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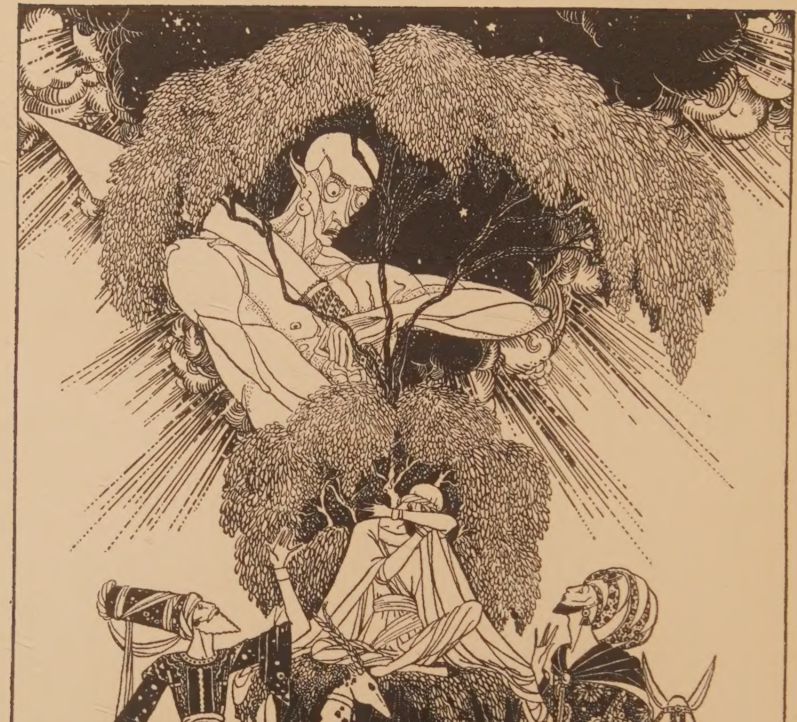
The Book of
THE THOUSAND NIGHTS
and ONE NIGHT


RODERICK McRAE
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"Come that I may kill you as you killed my child."

The Book of

THE THOUSAND NIGHTS and ONE NIGHT

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The Book of

THE THOUSAND NIGHTS and ONE NIGHT

Rendered from the literal and complete
version of Dr. J. C. Mardrus;
and collated with other
sources; by

E. POWYS MATHERS

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from drawings by
RODERICK MCRAE

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Because
The Book Of
A Thousand Nights and One Night
is
Fearless in its Exposition of Beauty,
is
Learned, Jovial, Tolerant,
Youthful, Modern,
Great and Generous;
I dedicate
My Version of it
to
Havelock Ellis.

E.P.M.

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AS ALLAH WILLS!
IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE!

Praise be to Allah, master of the Universe! And prayer and peace upon the Prince of Messengers, Muhamad, our lord paramount! And upon all his people prayer and peace together for ever until the judgment day!

And afterwards! may the legends of the men of old be lessons to the people of our day, so that a man may see those things which befell others beside himself: then he will honour and consider carefully the words and adventures of past peoples, and will reprove himself.

Also glory be to him who preserved the tales of the first dwellers to be a guide for the purposes of the last!

Now it is from among these lessons that the stories
called The Thousand Nights and One Night
are taken; together with all that there
is in them of wonder and
instruction.

THE TALE OF KING SHAHRYAR AND OF HIS BROTHER, KING SHAHZAMAN

IT IS RELATED—but Allah is all wise and all knowing, all powerful and all beneficent—that there was, in the tide and show of ancient time and the passage of the age and of the moment, a king among the kings of Sassan, in the isles of India and China. He was master of armies and auxiliaries, of slaves and of a great following; and he had two sons, one tall and the other small. Both were heroic horsemen; but the taller was the greater in this exercise and reigned over lands and governed with justice among men, so that the peoples of the land and of the kingdom loved him. His name was King Shahryar. The smaller brother was called King Shahzaman and ruled over Samarkand Al-Ajam.

Both lived in their countries and were just rulers of the people for a space of twenty years; by the end of which time each was at the height of his splendour and his growth.

This was the way with them until the tall king was seized by a violent longing to see his brother. Then he commanded his wazir to depart and return with him: and the wazir answered: "I hear and I obey."

The wazir set out and, arriving in all security by the grace of Allah, entered the presence of the brother, wished him peace, and told him the purpose of his journey.

King Shahzaman answered: "I hear and I obey." Then he made preparations for his departure and for the going out of his tents, his camels, and mules, his slaves and fighting-men. Lastly he raised his own wazir to the governorship, and departed to seek the lands of his brother.

But, in the middle of the night, he recalled a thing which he had left forgotten at the palace. Returning and entering his private apartment he found his wife embraced shamelessly by a black slave. At this sight, the world darkened before his face and he said within his soul: "If such a thing has come to pass when I have hardly left the city, what would the conduct of this wanton be if I were absent for long at my brother's house?" So he drew his sword and with one stroke killed them upon the carpets of the bed. Then he returned and, ordering his camp to move forward, journeyed through the night till he came to his brother's city.

His brother rejoiced at his approach, went out to meet him and, greeting him, wished him peace; also he adorned the city for him, and began to speak with him jovially. But King Shahzaman remembered the affair of his wife and a cloud of grief veiled him; his cheeks became sallow and his body frail. King Shahryar, seeing him in this pass and thinking it was due to his exile from lands and kingdom, questioned him no further on the subject and let him be. But, on a later day, he said: "My brother, I know not! and yet I see your body grow frail and your cheeks sallow." Shahzaman answered: "My brother, I am stricken in the heart of my heart.'' But he did not reveal what he had seen happen to his wife. So King Shahryar continued: ''Then come hunting and coursing with me, for in that pursuit perhaps your breast may throw off this trouble.'' But King Shahzaman had no wish to do so; and his brother went out to hunt alone.

Now there were in the king's palace certain windows that looked on to the garden, and, as King Shahzaman leant there and looked out, the door of the palace opened and twenty women slaves with twenty men slaves came from it; and the wife of the king, his brother, was among them and walked there in all her bright beauty. When they came to the pool of a fountain they all undressed and mingled one with another. Suddenly, on the king's wife crying; ''O Massaud! Ya Massaud!'' a gigantic negro ran towards her. They embraced each other with fervent caresses. All of the other slaves did the same with the women and they continued thus a long while, not ceasing their kisses and embraces and the like until the very approach of dawn.

At this sight the king's brother said within himself: ''By Allah, mine is even a lighter misfortune than his.'' So he let his grief and discontent slip from him, saying to himself: ''Truly, this is more terrible than all which happened to me.'' And from that moment he began to drink again and to eat without pause.

Meanwhile the king, his brother, came back from hunting, and the two wished each other peace. Then King Shahryar, observing his brother Shahzaman, saw that colour and life and come back to him and further that he, who had so long dealt sparingly with his food, now ate abundantly. So, in his astonishment, he asked him the explanation of this; and the other answered: ''Listen and I will tell you the cause of my former pallor. When you sent your wazir to me to require my presence at your side, I made my preparation for departure and left my city. But afterwards, remembering the present which I destined for you and which I gave you at the palace, I went back and found my wife lying with a black slave, the two sleeping upon the carpets of my bed. I killed the pair of them and made my way to you, thrice wretched in my thought for what had happened. That was the cause of my former paleness and loss of strength. As for the return of colour to my cheeks, spare me. I pray, from speaking of it."

When his brother heard these words, he said: "By Allah, I conjure you to tell me the other half of the matter!" So King Shahzaman told him all that he had seen. And King Shahryar exclaimed: "First must I see this with my own eyes!" To this his brother answered: "Make it appear, then, that you are going out to hunt and course; but hide instead with me, and you shall be witness of the sight and see the truth of it!"

Immediately the king proclaimed his departure by the public crier and the soldiers went out beyond the city with their tents. The king went forth also and, settling himself in his tents, said to his young slaves: "Let no one enter!" Then he disguised himself and, leaving secretly, went towards the palace where his brother was. On his arrival he stationed himself at the window giving on to the garden. Scarcely had an hour passed when the women slaves, circling about their mistress, came into the garden with the men slaves; and they did all that Shahzaman had told of them and passed the time in these diversions until Asr, the beginning of the sun's decline.

When King Shahryar saw these things, reason fled from her seat in his mind and he said to his brother Shahzaman: "Let us go hence and fare forth to seek our destiny upon the road of Allah; for we have no right in royalty, nor shall have, until we have found someone who has met a fate like ours: without that, in truth, death would be better than our lives." To this his brother made the fitting answer and both went out by a secret door of the palace. They travelled night and day until they came to a tree in the middle of a lonely meadow near the salt sea. In this meadow there was an eyelet of fresh water at which they drank and afterwards sat down to rest. An hour had hardly passed when the sea began to be troubled and suddenly a column of black smoke came up out of it which rose to the sky and moved towards the meadow. Seeing this, they became afraid and climbed as high as they were able into the tall tree, and began to consider what this might mean. Then, behold! the smoke column changed to a Jinni of great size, vast-shouldered, gigantically-breasted, and carrying on his head a box. He put foot to the earth, came towards the tree in which they were, and stopped below it. Then he lifted the lid of the box and took from it a large coffer which he also opened; and thereupon appeared a desirable young girl, bright in her beauty, shining like the sun, —as the poet says:

She comes, a torch in the shadows, and it is day;
Her light more brightly lights the dawn.
Suns leap from out her beauty
And moons are born in the smiling of her eyes.
Ah, that the veils of her mystery might be rent
And the folk of the world lie ravished at her feet.
Forced by the great light of her sweet glancing,
Wet tears smart forth from every watching eye.

When the Jinni had looked long at the beauty of the girl, he said to her: "O Queen of every silky thing! O you whom I ravished away upon your bridal night! I would sleep a little." And the Jinni, resting his head upon the knees of the young girl, went to sleep.

Then the child raised her head and saw the two kings hidden in the tree-top. At once she lifted the head of the Jinni from her knees, rested it upon the ground, and stood up beneath the tree, saying to them by signs: "Come down. Have no fear of this Ifrit." They also answered by signs: "Allah be with you! Pray excuse us from such a dangerous undertaking!" She said: "I conjure you by Allah! Come down quickly, or I will warn the Ifrit and he shall kill you with the worst of deaths!" Then they were afraid and came down beside her; and she said at once: "Come at once, and make love to me; if not, I will wake the Ifrit." Then Shahryar said fearfully to Shahzaman: "You my brother, do first what she requires!" To which the other answered: "I will do nothing until you have given me an example, my elder brother!" And each began to coax the other, making with their eyes gestures of desire. Then she said: "Why do I see you working your eyes in this way? If you do not come forward and love me at once, I will wake the Ifrit." So, in their fear of the Jinni, they both did to her as she had commanded, and when they were well wearied, she said: "You are indeed experienced lovers!" Then, drawing from her pocket a little bag, she took from it a necklace of five hundred and seventy seal-rings, saying: "Know you what these are?" And they answered: "We do not know." Then she said: "The givers of these seal-rings have all made love to me on the unwitting horns of this Ifrit. So now, O brothers, give me yours!" Then they gave her their seal-rings, taking them off their hands. Whereon she said: "Know that this Ifrit carried me off on the night of my marriage, prisoned me in a coffer and placed that coffer in a box and fastened about the box seven chains, yes, and then laid me at the bottom of the moaning sea that wars and dashes with its waves. But he did not know that whenever any one of us women desires a thing, nothing can prevent her from it. And the poet said, besides:—

Friend, trust not at all in women, smile at their promising,
For they lower or they love at the caprice of their parts.
Filled to the mouth with deceit, they lavish a lying love;
Even while the very floss fringing their silks is faithless.
Respect and remember the words of Yusuf. Forget not
Eblis worked all Adam's woe with one woman.
Rail not, my friend. At his house, at whom you are railing,
Mild love tomorrow will give place to madness.
Say not: "If I love, I'll escape the follies of loving."
But rather: "Only a miracle brings a man safe from among them."

At these words the brothers marvelled even to the limits of marvelling and said to each other: "If this be a Jinni and in spite of his power much more terrible things have happened to him than to us, it is an adventure which ought to console us!"

So at that same hour they left the young woman and returned each to his own city.

When King Shahryar entered his palace, he caused his wife's head to be cut off at the neck, and in the same way the heads of the slaves, both men and women. Then he ordered his wazir to bring him every night a young and virgin girl, whom without remorse when the night had passed, he caused to be slain. This he did for three long years; so that the people were all one cry of grief, one tumult of horror. They fled away with such daughters as remained to them; and in all the city there remained not one girl who retained the state to serve for this assault.

At last the King, as was his custom, ordered the wazir to bring him a young girl; and the wazir went forth and hunted, but found no girl at all. So he returned to his own home, dejected and wretched, and with his soul full of his fear of the King.

Now this wazir had himself two daughters who in the matters of beauty, charm, brilliance, perfection, and delicate taste, were each unrivalled save by the other. The name of the elder was Shahrazade, and that of the younger Doniazade. Shahrazade had read the books, the annals, and the legends of old kings, together with the histories of past peoples. Also she was credited with possessing a thousand books of stories telling of the peoples, the kings, and the poets of bygone ages and of past time. She was sweetly eloquent of speech and to listen to her was music.

When she had looked at her father, she said: "Why do I see you so bowed and changed with care and sorrow? Know, my father, that the poet says: 'Thou who art sad, oh be comforted; for nothing endures and, as every joy vanishes away, so also vanishes every sorrow!'"

When the wazir heard these words, he told his daughter from beginning to end all that had happened concerning the King. Then Shahrazade said: "By Allah, father, you must marry me to this king; for either I shall live or, dying, I shall be a ransom for the daughters of the Mussulmans and the cause of their deliverance out of the hands of the King." Then said he: "Allah be with you! You shall never expose yourself to such a danger." And she answered: "It is necessary that I do this." So he said to her: "Take care that the fate of the ass with the bull and the husbandman befall not you also. Listen":

THE FABLE OF THE ASS, THE BULL AND THE HUSBANDMAN

Know, my daughter, that there was once a merchant, master of riches and cattle, married and the father of children; to whom Allah had also given understanding of the tongues of beasts and birds. The place of this merchant's house was in a fertile land on the bank of a river, and in his farm there were an ass and a bull.

One day the bull came to the stable where the ass was lodged and found it well swept and watered, with well-winnowed barley in the manger and on the ground well-sifted straw, and the ass lying there at his ease. (For when his master mounted him it would only be for some short ride that chance demanded, and the ass would quickly return to his rest.) Now on that day the merchant heard the bull say to the ass: "Give you joy of your food, and may you find it healthy, profitable, and of a good digestion! I myself am weary; but you are rested. You eat well-winnowed barley and are cared for; and if, on occasion, your master mounts you, he brings you quickly back. As for me I am but used to labour and to work the mill." And the ass said:

"When you go out into the field and they put the yoke upon your neck, throw yourself to the earth and do not rise, even if they beat you; also, when you do get up, fall down again immediately. And, after, if they let you back to the byre and give you beans to eat, leave them, as if you were ill. Force yourself in this way not to eat or drink for a day or two or even three. Thus you will rest from your labour and your weariness."

Remember that the merchant was there and heard their words.

When the husbandman came to give forage to the bull, he saw that he ate very little; and when in the morning he took him out to work he found him to be ill. Then the merchant said to the husbandman: "Take the ass and make him work in the bull's place for the whole day!" So the man returned and took the ass in place of the bull and made it labour during the whole day.

When the ass came back to the stable at the end of the day, the bull thanked him for his goodness of heart and for having let him rest from his fatigue. But the ass answered nothing and, instead, repented very bitterly.

Next day the husbandman came and took the ass again and made him work till the fall of day; so that the ass returned with a galled neck and broken by fatigue. Then the bull, seeing the state he was in, began to thank him with effusion and load him with praises. To which the ass replied: "How restful were the days before this, when nothing but luxury was my lot," and added: "Meanwhile I will give you a piece of good advice; I heard our master say: 'If the bull does not get up from his place, we must hand him over to the slaughterer to kill and to make a leather cloth for the table!' I am much afraid for your safety."

When the bull heard the ass's words, he thanked him and said: "Tomorrow I will go with them freely and attend to my labours." With that he began to eat and swallowed all the forage and even licked the bushel clean with his tongue.

Remember their master saw and heard all this.

When day came the merchant went out with his wife towards the byres and both of them sat down. Then the husbandman came and took out the bull who, at the sight of his master, began to frisk his tail, and loudly break wind, and gallop wildly in all directions. The merchant was seized with such a laughter that he rolled on his back. His wife asked: "What are you laughing at?" He answered: "At a thing which I have seen and heard, but of which I may not tell you without dying." And she said: "You must tell me the reason of your laughter, even if you have to die for it." He said: "I cannot tell you, because I fear to die." Then said she: "I know, you are laughing at me." After this she did not cease to quarrel and confound him with wilful words until she drove him into great perplexity. Finally, he made his children come to him and sent to call the Kadi and other witnesses, wishing to make his will, before he should tell the secret to his wife and die. For he greatly loved his wife, since she was the daughter of his father's brother and the mother of his children, and since he had lived with her for one hundred and twenty years. Further, he invited all his wife's relatives and the folk of the district and, relating the story, told them how he would die on the instant of revealing his secret. Then all who were present said to the wife: "Allah be with you! Leave this matter on one side lest your husband, the father of your children, die." But she answered: "I will never leave him in peace until he tells me, even if he has to die for it." So they stopped reasoning with her; and the merchant rose from among them and went, by the side of the stable, towards the garden, in order that he might first make his death ablution there and then return to tell his secret and to die.

Now the merchant had a valiant cock which could satisfy fifty hens; and also a dog. And he heard the dog calling to the cock and scolding it, saying: "Are you not ashamed of being so gay when our master is on the point of death?" Then the cock asked the dog how this was so, and, when the dog had told him the story, he exclaimed: "By Allah, our master is extraordinarily lacking in intelligence! I myself have fifty wives, and I succeed very well by contenting one and scolding another; while he, who has only one wife, does not know the way of dealing even with her. It is quite simple; he has but to cut himself some good mulberry twigs, go back in strength to his private room, and beat her until she either dies or repents. She will not importune him with any questions on any subject after that, I do assure you." So the cock spoke, and when the merchant heard him, light returned to his reason and he resolved to beat his wife.

Here the wazir paused in his story and said to his daughter Shahrazade: "It may be I shall do to you as the merchant did to his wife." She asked him: "What did he do?" And the wazir continued:

The merchant entered his wife's chamber, after having cut and hidden about him certain mulberry twigs and called to her, saying: "Come into my private room that I may tell you my secret, out of the sight of all, and then die." So she entered with him and he shut the door of the private room and fell upon her with redoubled blows until she swooned away. Finally when she could speak she cried: "I repent! I repent!" and, beginning to caress her husband's hands and feet, did repent in very truth. Afterwards she walked out with him, and all the relatives and those gathered there rejoiced. Happy and prosperous were the fortunes of them all until their deaths.

Thus he spoke, and when Shahrazade, the wazir's daughter, heard her father's story, she said: "Even so, my father, I wish you to do what I have asked you." So the wazir, without insisting further, had the wedding garments of his daughter, Shahrazade, made ready; and went to tell the matter to King Shahryar.

Meanwhile, Shahrazade gave these instructions to her young sister: "When I am with the King I will send to fetch you; then when you have come and when you see the King weary of kissing me you must say: 'Tell me, my sister, some of your stories of marvel that the night may pass pleasantly.' Then will I tell you tales which, if Allah wills, shall be the deliverance of the daughters of the Mussulmans."

After this, the wazir, her father, came to take her and went up with her into the presence of the King. And the King, being overborne with happiness said to him: "Is the needful thing indeed present?" And respectfully the wazir answered: "Yes!"

But when the King wished to take the young girl, she began to weep, so that he asked: "What ails you?" She answered: "O my King, I have a little sister and I would say my farewells to her." So the King sent for the little sister, who came and threw herself upon the neck of Shahrazade, and lastly cowered down beside the bed.

Then the King rose, and took the maiden.

Afterwards they spoke together and Doniazade said to Shahrazade: "Allah be with you! Tell us, my sister, some of your tales of marvel, that the night may pass pleasantly.'' And Shahrazade answered: ''Gladly and as a duty, if the great and courteous King permits.'' When the King heard these words, and being moreover unable to sleep, he was in no way averse to listening to the tale of Shahrazade.

And Shahrazade, this first night, began the following tale:

HERE BEGIN THE THOUSAND NIGHTS AND ONE NIGHT

THE TALE OF THE MERCHANT AND THE IFRIT

Shahrazade said:

It has come to me, O auspicious King, that there was once a merchant of the merchants, master of many riches and of affairs of commerce in all lands.

One day, he mounted on horseback and left for certain places whither his business called him. As the heat became too vexing, he sat down under a tree and, putting his hand into his food-bag, took from it a snack and also some dates. When he had finished eating the dates, he threw the stones to a distance; but suddenly an enormous Ifrit appeared who approached him, brandishing a sword and crying: ''Rise up, that I may slay you as you have slain my child!'' On this the merchant asked: ''How have I slain your child?'' The other said: ''When you threw the stones of the dates you had eaten, they struck my boy in the breast and he died forthwith.'' Then said the merchant to the Ifrit: ''Know, O great Ifrit, that I am a Believer and know not how to lie. Now I have many riches and children and a wife; also I have my home deposits which have been trusted to me. Give me leave to go to my house that I may render each his due and, when I have done this, I will return to you. Indeed, indeed, you have my promise and my oath that I will return to you forthwith. Then you shall do to me as you wish. And Allah is a witness of my words." So the Jinni had trust in the merchant and let him depart.

The merchant returned to his own land, rid himself of his obligations, rendered each his due, and, lastly, revealed to his wife and his children the fate that had overtaken him. So they all, relations, women, and children, began to weep. Then the merchant made his will and rested with his folk until the year's end; after which taking his winding-sheet beneath his arm, he bade farewell to his nearest, to his neighbours, and to the folk of his house, and went forth, as it were, in spite of his nose. Then indeed was lamentation made and grief cried over him.

As for the merchant, he continued to journey until he came to the garden on the first day of the new year.

Now, while he sat down to weep over his fate, behold a venerable sheikh came towards him leading a gazelle by a chain. He saluted the merchant, wishing him a life of prosperity and saying to him: "What is the reason of your staying alone upon this Jinn-haunted spot?" Then the merchant told him of his adventure with the Ifrit. And the sheikh, master of the gazelle, being greatly astonished, said: "By Allah, your faith, my brother, is indeed a rare faith! And your story is so prodigious that, were it only written with a needle on the inner corner of an eye, it would yet be a matter of reflection to the circumspect." Then he sat down by the merchant's side, saying: "By Allah! I shall certainly stay here with you, my brother, until I have seen what happens between you and the Ifrit." So he stayed, conversing with the merchant, and beheld him swooning with fear and horror, a prey to deep sorrow and to stormy thoughts. Suddenly, as the master of the gazelle waited, there came a second sheikh who advanced towards them, leading two dogs of greyhound breed which were both black. He came up to them, wishing them peace and asking the reason of their stay upon the Jinn-haunted spot. So they told him the story from beginning to end. But hardly had he seated himself, when a third sheikh came towards them, leading a bay-coloured she-mule, and he also wished them peace and asked them the reason of their stay. Again they told the story from beginning to end; but nothing is gained by repeating it in this place.

In a little while a sand-devil lifted and a great wind blew heavily, coming towards the middle of the grassland. Then, the dust dispersing, the self-same Jinni appeared, a fine-sharpened blade in his hand and sparks of fire storming from his eyes. He came to them and, seizing the merchant from among them, said: "Come, that I may kill you as you killed my child, who was the breath of my life and the fire of my heart." Then the merchant began to weep and lament; and the three sheikhs also set themselves most conspicuously to weep and groan and sob.

But the first sheikh, master of the gazelle, at last plucked up his courage and kissed the hand of the Jinni, saying: "O Jinni, O chief among the kings of the Jinns and their crown also, if I relate to you the tale of myself and this gazelle and it is such that you marvel at it, oh, grant me in return mercy for a third of the blood of this merchant!" The Jinni answered: "Assuredly, O venerable sheikh. If you tell me the story and I find it indeed extraordinary, I will grant you mercy for a third of this blood!"

THE TALE OF THE FIRST SHEIKH

The First Sheikh said:

O great Ifrit, know that this gazelle was my uncle's daughter and my own flesh and blood. I married her when she was quite young and lived with her for nearly thirty years; but Allah granted me no child by her. So I took a concubine who, by Allah's favour, gave me a man-child as beautiful as the rising moon, with fine eyes, meeting brows, and perfect limbs. When he had grown to be a boy of fifteen, I was obliged to journey to a far city on an important matter of business.

You must know that my uncle's daughter, this gazelle, had been initiated since childhood into sorcery and the lore of enchantment. By the art of magic she changed my son into a calf and the slave his mother into a cow; and put both of them under the care of our herd.

A long time afterwards I came back from my journey and asked for my son and his mother. Then my wife said: "Your slave is dead and your son has fled I know not whither!"

For a year I remained broken by my heart's grief with the tears ever in my eyes.

Then when the yearly feast of the Day of Sacrifice came round, I sent to bid my herd choose a well-fattened cow for me; and he brought me one, but she was my concubine bewitched by this gazelle. Then I pulled up the sleeves and skirts of my garments and, knife in hand, prepared to sacrifice the cow; but suddenly she began to moan and weep abundant tears. So I stopped and ordered the herd to sacrifice her. He did so; but when he had flayed her, we found neither fat nor flesh on her but only skin and bone. Then I repented that I had sacrificed her—though my repentance was of no avail—and gave her to the herd saying: "Bring me a well-fatted calf." So he brought me my son in the likeness of a calf.

When the calf saw me he broke the cord that held him and running to me rolled at my feet with groans and tears. Then I had pity on him and said to the herd: "Bring me another cow and let this be."

At this point in her tale, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent. Then her sister Doniazade said: "Sister, your words are sweet and gentle and pleasant to the taste." And Shahrazade answered: "Indeed, they are nothing to that which I would tell both of you tomorrow night if I were still alive and the King thought good to spare me." On this, the King said to himself: "By Allah, I will not kill her until I have heard the rest of her tale!"

Then the King and Shahrazade passed the rest of the night in each other's arms, till the King departed to sit in judgment. When he saw the wazir approach, carrying under his arm the winding sheet destined for his daughter Shahrazade, whom he believed already dead, the King said nothing to him but continued to administer justice, raising some to office and debasing others, until the fall of day. So that the wazir was plunged into perplexity and the extreme of astonishment.

When the Diwan was over, King Shahryar returned to his palace.

And When
The Second Night
Had Come

Doniazade said to Shahrazade: "Sister, I pray you finish for us the tale of the merchant and the Jinni." To this Shahrazade answered: "With all my heart and as my duty is, if the King permits." Then the King said: "You may speak."

And she said:

It is related, O favoured King and lover of justice, that, when the merchant saw the calf weeping, his heart was softened and he said to the herd: "Leave this calf to graze among the cows."

The Jinni was mightily astonished at this strange tale and the sheikh, master of the gazelle, continued:

O master of the kings of the Jinn, my uncle's daughter, this gazelle, was looking on and said to me: "Certainly we must sacrifice this calf; he is fattened to perfection." But for very pity I could not make up my mind to sacrifice him and at my order the herd took him again and went away with him.

On the next day, as I was sitting in my house, the herd came to me saying: "Master I have a joyful thing to tell you, good news worthy of recompense." "Surely," I answered. Then he said: "Great merchant, my daughter is a sorceress and has learnt magic from an old woman who lodges with us. Yesterday, when you gave me that calf, I brought him with me into the presence of my daughter; and scarcely had she set eyes on him when she covered her face with her veil, first weeping and then laughing. Finally she said to me: 'Has my worth so fallen in your eyes that you let strange men like this come into my presence?' 'Where are these strange men?' I answered: 'And why have you wept and then laughed?' Then she said: 'This calf with you is the son of our master, the merchant, but he is bewitched; yes, both he and his mother, bewitched by his step-mother; and it was the calf expression of his face at which I laughed. And if I wept it was for the mother of this poor calf, slain by his father.' I was greatly astonished by these words of my daughter and waited with impatience for the dawn that I might come to tell you."

Then, mighty Jinni, continued the sheikh, hearing the herd's words, I went out with him, drunken without wine, for joy of seeing my son again. When I came to the herd's house, his young daughter welcomed me, kissing my hand, and the calf came and rolled at my feet. Then I asked the herd's daughter: "Is what you say of this calf true?" And she answered: "Yes, master, indeed! He is your son, your heart's delight." Then said I: "My gentle, helpful child, if you deliver my son, I will give you all the cattle and the goods your father holds for me." She smiled at my words and said: "Master, I would only be willing to take these riches on two conditions; the first, that I marry your son; and the second, that I have your leave to bewitch and confine whomsoever I wish. Without these things I cannot answer for the good of my interference against the evil arts of your wife."

Mighty Jinni, when I heard the words of the herd's daughter I answered: "Be it so! And further you shall have the riches, which your father holds for me. As for my uncle's daughter, you may dispose of her life as you wish."

When she heard me say this, she took a small copper basin and filled it with water, speaking magic incantations over it. Then she sprinkled the calf with the water and conjured him in these words: "If Allah made thee a calf, remain a calf; but if thou art bewitched, return to thy former shape, by the grace of Allah, the Most High!" Even as she spoke the calf, beginning to tremble and dislimn, returned to human form. I threw myself upon him in a long embrace and then I asked him in the name of Allah to tell me what my uncle's daughter had done to him and to his mother. So he told me all that had happened and I said: "My son, Allah, master of destinies, has raised up one to save you and restore your rights."

After this, good Jinni, I married my son to the herd's daughter; and she by magic arts bewitched my wife, turning her into this gazelle, which you now see. Passing by here I saw this excellent merchant and, asking him what he did and hearing what had happened, I sat down to watch the event. Such is my story.

Then the Jinni cried: "Your tale is marvellous enough and I grant you mercy for a third of this blood."

After this the second sheikh, master of the two greyhounds, came forward and said: "O mighty Ifrit, if I tell you the adventure which befell me from these two hounds, which are my brothers, and if you find it more marvellous than the tale you have just heard, will you grant me mercy for another third of this man's blood?" "Assuredly, venerable sheikh," answered the Jinni, "if your adventure be indeed more marvellous."

So the second sheikh began

THE TALE OF THE SECOND SHEIKH

Know, O lord of the kings of Jinn, that these two hounds are my brothers, and I am the third. When our father died, he left us an inheritance of three thousand dinars and with my share I opened a shop and began to trade in it. My brothers did the same; but soon one of them set out on a commercial venture and was away with the caravans for over a year. When he returned, he had lost all his money and I was moved to say to him: "Brother, did I not counsel you against this journey?" Then he wept and said: "Allah, the all-powerful, allowed this loss of mine and your words cannot help me now that I have nothing left." Then I brought him up into my shop and afterwards conducted him to the baths and gave him a fine robe of rare workmanship. When at last we were sitting down to eat together, I told my brother that I was about to compute the yearly gains from my shop; and that, leaving the capital untouched, I would divide whatever profit there might be equally between us. When, on making my accounts, I found that I had a profit of a thousand dinars for the year, I gave thanks to the power and greatness of Allah and rejoiced exceedingly. Then I divided the sum equally between my brother and myself; and we dwelt together for many days.

But at length both my brothers made up their minds to go on a second journey and wished me to set out with them. When I declined this invitation, pointing out that the result of the first journey did not tempt me to imitate them, they began to reproach me. But their words were of no avail and we stayed buying and selling, each in our respective shops, for a whole year. At the end of the year, they again proposed a journey and again I refused and this went on for six whole years. But at last I acceded to their request to set out with them and suggested that we should count up what money we had. We did so and found that it came in all to six thousand dinars. Then said I: "Let us hide the half of this in the earth to be a help if we encounter ill fortune and let us each take with us a thousand dinars to trade with." "May Allah favour your advice," they answered. So, taking the money and dividing it, I hid three thousand dinars and divided the other three thousand between us three. Then we bought merchandise of many kinds, hired a ship and, placing all we had on board her, set sail.

After a month's voyage, we dropped anchor at a certain city where we sold our goods at a profit of ten dinars for one. Then we left the city.

When we came down to the sea side, we found there a woman dressed in old and tattered garments who approached me and kissed my hand saying: "Master, can you help me and save me? Well I know how to repay your goodness!" I answered: "Certainly I will help and save you, but you must not think it necessary to repay me." "Marry me, then, Master," she said, "carry me with you to your country and I will pledge my soul to you. Do this for me, for I am of those who know the value of an obligation. Also, I pray, do not be ashamed of my poor condition." When I heard her speak, I pitied her from the bottom of my heart, for nothing comes to pass but Allah wills it. I carried her with me, clothed her in rich garments and stretched fine carpets for her on the ship. Then when I had given her a full and cordial welcome, we set sail.

As time went on I grew to love her and would not be parted from her day or night, preferring her company to that of my brothers. So they grew jealous of me, envying me my riches and the beauty of my possessions. They cast greedy eyes on all that I had and plotted my death and the theft of my money. Satan made this plan seem good to them.

One day, as I lay sleeping by my wife's side, they stole up to us and cast us both into the sea. My wife woke in the water and suddenly, changing her shape, became an Ifrita. Then she took me upon her shoulders and, carrying me to an island, left me and disappeared for the whole night. In the morning she returned and said: "Do you not know me? I am your wife. It was I who held you up and saved you from death by Allah's grace. Know now, that I am a Jinnia and when first I saw you, my heart loved you, for Allah willed it so, and I am a believer in Him and in His prophet, whom may He bless and keep. Even when I came to you in poor estate you were willing to marry me and now, in my turn, I have saved you from death in the water. As for your brothers, I am enraged against them and must kill them."

Astonished by her words, I thanked her heartily. "But as for killing my brothers, this thing must not be," I said, and told her all that had happened between us from beginning to end. When she had heard me out, she said: "Tonight I will fly to them and sink their ship so that they die." Then said I: "Allah be with you! do not do this thing, for the Master of Proverbs says: 'You who have helped the unworthy, know that the wicked man has in his wickedness punishment enough!' And whatever they have done, they are still my brothers." "No! I must kill them," she said, and I begged her clemency in vain; for she took me on her shoulders and, flying through the air, set me down upon the terrace of my house at home.

I opened the door of my house and lifted the three thousand dinars from their hiding place. Then, after making the customary visits of greeting, I opened my shop and stocked it anew with goods.

When night came, I shut my shop, and entering my own house, found these two hounds tied up in a corner. When they saw me, they rose weeping and caught hold of my garments. At that moment, my wife ran up to me saying: "These are your brothers." And when I asked her who had done this thing to them, she answered: "I did! I asked my sister, who is far more deeply learned in enchantments than I am, and she changed them into these forms out of which they cannot come again until ten years have passed."

That is why, O powerful Jinni, I happen to be in this place, because I am on my way to my sister-in-law to beg her to deliver these poor creatures now that ten years have passed. When I came here, I saw this good merchant and, after hearing his story, wished to remain and witness what would happen between him and you. This is my story.

"Truly a remarkable tale!" the Jinni said, "For it I grant you mercy on a third of this blood which is forfeit to me."

Then the third sheikh, master of the mule, came forward and said to the Jinni: "I will tell you a tale more marvellous than either of these, if you will grant me mercy for the rest of the blood which is forfeit to you." "Let it be so!" answered the Jinni.

And the third sheikh said:

THE TALE OF THE THIRD SHEIKH

O thou Sultan, O thou chief of the Jinns, this mule, which you see, was once my wife. A time came when I had been far away on a journey for a whole year. When at last my business was finished, I returned by night and found her lying with a black slave on the carpets of my bed. They were talking, laughing, and kissing, also they played chess and other games. As soon as my wife saw me, she sprang up and came towards me, snatching up a pitcher of water. She whispered a few words over the pitcher and sprinkled some of the water over me saying: "Come out from thy proper shape and put on the form of a dog!" At once I became a dog and she chased me from the house. I wandered about the city and, coming at last to a butcher's shop, went near and began eating the bones. When the master of the shop saw me, he lifted me and took me with him to his house.

When the butcher's daughter saw me, she veiled her face because of me, saying to her father: "Is this the way to behave? To bring a man with you into my presence?" "Where is this man you speak of?" said her father; and she answered: "This dog is a man. It is a woman who has bewitched him and I am able to save him." "Save him then, my daughter, in Allah's name!" said her father. She took a pitcher of water and after speaking certain words over it, sprinkled a few drops over me, saying: "Come out from this shape and return to thy former appearance!" So I returned to my former appearance and, kissing the young girl's hand, I told her that I ardently wished to bewitch my wife, as she had bewitched me. Then the butcher's daughter gave me a little of the water telling me, if I found my wife asleep to sprinkle her and that she would then become whatever I wished. So, finding her asleep, I sprinkled her with the water, saying: "Leave this shape and put on the form of a mule!" And forthwith she became a mule, as you may see with your own eyes, O sultan and chief of all the kings of the Jinns!

Then the Jinni, turning to the mule, asked her: "Is this true?" At which she nodded her head, as if to say: "Yes, yes, it is true!"

This tale made the Jinni tremble with pleasurable emotion and he remitted the last third of the merchant's blood to the old man.

Here, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent. Then her sister Doniazade said: "Sister, your words are sweet and gentle and pleasant to the taste." And Shahrazade answered: "Indeed, they are nothing to that which I would tell both of you tomorrow night if I were still alive and the King thought good to spare me." On this, the King said to himself: "By Allah, I will not kill her until I have heard the rest of her remarkable tale!"

Then the King and Shahrazade spent the rest of the night in each other's arms, till the King departed for the Council. The wazir and the officers of the court came in and, when the Diwan was full of people, the King gave judgment, raising some and abasing others, concluding cases and giving commands, until the fall of day. At length the Diwan rose and King Shahryar returned to his palace.

And When
The Third Night
Had Come

Doniazade said: "Sister, I pray you finish your tale." To this Shahrazade answered: "Gladly and with all my heart!" Then she continued:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the third sheikh had told the most wonderful tale of the three, the Jinni was stricken with wonder and trembled with pleasurable emotion. At last he said: "I grant you the rest of the forfeit and here relinquish this merchant to you."

Then the merchant in an ecstasy of happiness came and thanked the sheikhs and they, in their turn, congratulated him on his safe deliverance.

After this, each returned to his own country.

But, continued Shahrazade, these tales are in no way more wonderful than the tale of the fisherman.
"What is the tale of the fisherman?" asked the King.

And Shahrazade said:

THE FISHERMAN AND THE JINNI

It is related, O auspicious King, that there was once a fisherman, very old and poor, who was married and had three children.

He used to cast his net four times a day, never more often. Now once, when he had gone to the shore at noon, he set down his basket and, casting his net, waited for it to sink to the bottom. When it had done so he twitched the cords and found it so heavy that he could not pull it in. So, bringing the ends to shore, he made them fast to a wooden stake. Then he undressed and, diving into the sea, laboured till he had hauled the net ashore. Dressing himself again in high good humour he examined the net and found that it contained a dead ass. Disgusted at this sight, he exclaimed: "Be it as Allah wills!" and added: "Yet it is a strange gift that Allah has seen good to send me." Then he recited this verse:

Blind diver in the dark
Of night and loss,
Luck delights not in energy;
Cease, and be still.

After he had freed the net and squeezed the water out of it, he waded into the sea and cast it again, invoking the name of Allah. When the net had sunk to the bottom, he again tried to pull it ashore but this time it was even heavier and harder to shift. Thinking that he had caught some great fish, he fastened the ends to the stake and, undressing again, dived in and carried the net to shore. This time he found a great earthen jar full of mud and sand. In his disappointment at this sight, he proclaimed these verses:

I said I wished that fortune would die or fly away,
Who lets a man be virtuous and then keeps back his pay.
I left my house to look for luck
(A search I now abandon);
She dropped the wise men in the muck
For all the fools to stand on,
And, having fixed this state of things,
She either died or sprouted wings.

Then he threw away the jar and cleaned his net, asking pardon from Allah the while for his lack of submission to the divine will. And finally, coming down to the sea, he cast for the third time and waited for the net to sink. When he hauled in this time, the net was full of broken pots and pieces of glass. Seeing this, he recited the stanza of a certain poet.

Be not astonished that the golden wind
Blows the world forward, leaving you behind.
There are no dinars in a rose-wood pen
For any but a merchant's hand to find.

Then lifting his face to the sky, he cried: "Allah, Allah! Thou knowest that I cast my net but four times in the day; and see! I have already cast it thrice.'' After this, he once more cast his net into the sea, again invoking the name of Allah, and waited for it to sink. This time, in spite of all his efforts, he could not move the net an inch, so hard was it held against the rocks below the water. Again he undressed crying: ''Be it as Allah wills!'' and diving for the fourth time, began to work the net until he had freed it and brought it to shore. This time he found in it a great jar of yellow copper, heavy and unhurt, its mouth stopped with lead and sealed with the seal of the lord Sulayman, son of David. Seeing this, the fisherman was delighted and said: ''Here is something that I can sell at the market of the coppersmiths. It must be worth at least ten dinars of gold.'' Then, after trying to shake the jar and finding it too heavy he continued: ''First I had better open the jar and hide whatever it contains in my basket; then I shall be able to sell the thing itself to the coppersmiths.'' So he took his knife and began to work the lead until he had removed it. Then he turned the jar over and shook it, but nothing came out except a cloud of smoke which rose to the blue sky and also spread along the earth. Finally the smoke, to the utter amazement of the fisherman, came clear of the vase and, shaking and thickening, turned to an Ifrit whose head reached to the clouds while his feet were on the ground. The head of this Ifrit was like a dome, his hands like pitchforks, his legs like the masts of a ship, and his mouth like a cave in which the teeth had the appearance of great stones. His nostrils were like jugs, his eyes like torches, and his hair was dusty and matted. At the appearance of this being the fisherman was so frightened that his muscles quivered, his teeth chattered together, and he stood with burning mouth, and eyes that could not see the light.

When the Jinni, in his turn, saw the fisherman, he cried: "There is no other God but Allah, and Sulayman is Allah's prophet!" Then, speaking directly to the fisherman, he said: "O great Sulayman, O thou prophet of Allah, slay me not. Never again will I be disobedient or mutiny against thy just decrees." Then said the fisherman: "Darest thou, O blasphemous giant, to call Sulayman the prophet of Allah? Sulayman has been dead for eighteen hundred years and we have come to the end of the world's time. What tale is this? How did you come to be in this jar?" At these words the Jinni altered his tone and said: "There is no other God but Allah. I bring good news, O fisherman!" "What news is that?" asked the poor man. And the Jinni answered: "News of your death, instant and most horrible." "Let Allah be far from rewarding you for such news, prince of the Afarit! Why do you wish my death and how have I deserved it? I delivered you out of your jar, breaking your long imprisonment in the sea." But the Ifrit only answered: "Consider and choose the manner of death you would prefer and the way that I shall kill you." "But what is my fault? What is my fault?" repeated the wretched fisherman. "Listen to my story and you shall know," said the Ifrit. "Speak then, and make your tale a short one," said the fisherman, "for my soul is ready to run out of my feet for very fear." So the Ifrit began:

Know that I am Sakhr El-Jinni, one of the rebel Afarit who mutinied against Sulayman, son of David. There was a time when Sulayman sent his wazir Assef, son of Barkhia, against me, who overpowered me in spite of all my strength and led me into the presence of Sulayman. You may believe that at that moment I humbled myself very low. Sulayman, seeing me, prayed to Allah and conjured me both to take that faith and to promise him obedience. When I refused, he had this jar brought before him and imprisoned me within it. Then he sealed it with lead and impressed thereon the Most High Name. Lastly, certain faithful Jinn took me upon their shoulders at his order and cast me into the middle of the sea. I stayed in the water for a hundred years and kept on saying: "I shall give eternal riches to him who sets me free!" But the hundred years passed and no one set me free. So, when I was entering on the second hundred years, I swore: "To him who sets me free will I both show and give all the treasures upon earth!" But no one freed me, and four hundred years passed away, and I said: "To him who frees me I will give the three wishes of his heart!" But still no one set me free. So I flew into a heat of passion in my jar and swore: "Now I will kill the man who frees me, my only gift being the choice of the death!" And it is you, O fisherman, who have set me free; therefore I let you choose the death you die.

Hearing the Ifrit speak in this way, the fisherman could not help exclaiming: "O Allah, the bad luck of it! It *would* have been left for me to do this freeing! Spare me, O Jinni, and Allah will spare you; kill me, and be very sure that He will raise up one to slay you also." Then said the Ifrit: "I shall kill you because you freed me. There is no help for it." On this the fisherman exclaimed: "Prince of the Afarit, indeed! Is this how you repay good with evil? The proverb does not lie which says:

If you would know the taste of bitterness
Seek sorrow out and comfort her distress;
You need not feed a jackal cub to see
Just how ungrateful gratitude can be."

But the Ifrit said: "You have used words enough. Prepare to meet your end." Then the fisherman reasoned with himself in this way: "Though I am a man and he is a Jinni, yet Allah has given me my share of brains. I think I see a trick, a stroke of subtlety, which may undo him yet." Then aloud to the Ifrit he said: "You are determined that I should die?" And when the other said: "No doubt of that!" the fisherman solemnly addressed him thus: "I conjure you by the Most High Name graved on the seal of Sulayman to answer me one question truthfully!" And when the Ifrit, dashed by hearing the Most High Name, promised that he would answer truthfully, the fisherman asked: "How could this jar which, as it is, scarcely could hold a foot or hand of yours, have ever held the whole of you?" "Can it be that you doubt this thing?" asked the Ifrit. And the other answered: "Never would I believe it unless I saw you with my own eyes entering the jar!"

But at this point Shahrazade saw the coming of morning and fell silent.

And When
The Fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that, when the fisherman told the Ifrit that he would not believe the thing unless he saw it with his own eyes, the Ifrit began to shake and waver to and fro until he became a smoke again. This smoke, after first sweeping to the sky, began to condense and creep little by little into the jar until it had all disappeared. Immediately the fisherman snatched up the leaden cap, sealed with the seal of Sulayman, and stoppered the neck of the jar with it. Then he called to the Ifrit, saying: "You there! Consider and choose the manner of death you would prefer, otherwise I am going to throw you into the sea and build a house for myself upon the shore there. I will prevent anyone from fishing by saying: 'An Ifrit is in the water there. If anyone pulls him out he will give them a choice of deaths as a reward!' " When the Ifrit heard the jeers of the fisherman, he tried to get out, but could not; and he felt that he was fastened down again with the seal of Sulayman above him, that seal no Jinni might prevail against. Feeling also that the fisherman was carrying him down to the sea, he called out: "No, no, no, I say!" To which the fisherman only answered: "Yes, yes, yes!" So the Jinni began to smooth his words and asked humbly what was to be done with him. "I am going to throw you into the sea!" said the fisherman. "Eighteen hundred years you have lain there and I shall see to it that you lie there until the Judgment Day. Did I not beg you to spare me that Allah might spare you; not to slay me that Allah might slay you not? But you spurned my prayer and used me wickedly. Therefore Allah has delivered you into my hands and I have bested you." Then wailed the Ifrit: "Open the jar and I will heap benefits upon you!" "You lie, O thing of treachery!" answered the fisherman. "It is between you and me as it passed between the wazir of King Yunan and Ruyan the doctor."

"What passed between the wazir of King Yunan and Ruyan the doctor?" asked the Ifrit. "And what tale is this?"

THE TALE OF THE WAZIR OF KING YUNAN AND RUYAN THE DOCTOR

THE FISHERMAN said: Know, O Ifrit, that there was, in the tide and show of ancient time and the passage of the age and of the moment, a king called Yunan in the city of Fars in the land of Roum. He was a rich and powerful king, master of armies, strong in his ways and allied with many a royal house. But his body was marred by a leprosy which baffled every doctor and learned man. Drugs, pellets and ointments were of no avail and no physician could find out a cure for it. Now one day an old and famous doctor, whose name was Ruyan, came to King Yunan's city. He had read books written in Greek, Persian, Latin, Arabic, and Syriac; he had studied the craft of medicine and of the stars and knew the principles and rules of each, their good and ill effects. Also he knew the virtues of all plants and of all herbs both fresh and dry, their good and ill effects. Moreover he had studied philosophy and all the sciences of healing and other sciences. When this doctor had come into the city and stayed there some days, he heard of the leprosy with which Allah had seen good to plague the body of the King and of the utter unsuccess which all the doctors and sages had met with in their treatment. Hearing these things the doctor pondered for a night, but when he woke at morning (when light shone high and Allah's bountiful jewel, the bright sun, kissed all the earth) he clothed himself in his richest garments and entered the King's palace. Kissing the earth between King Yunan's hands, he called down upon him power and pride everlasting and the richest blessings of Allah. After this he told him who he was and said: "My lord, I have been told of the evil which has eaten into your body and that no physician may find a way to remove it. So I have come to cure you, nor will I give you any drug to drink in my cure nor salve to rub upon you." "How will you do that?" asked King Yunan in astonishment. "For as Allah lives, if you cure me I will enrich you, and the sons of your sons after you. I will grant you wishes and realise them for you, and you shall be my cupmate and my friend." Then the King gave him a fair robe and other gifts and asked again: "Is it really true that you will cure this ill of mine without drugs or salves?" "Indeed it is true," the other answered. "Also the cure shall be without weariness or pain." Then the King, being even more astonished, asked eagerly: "Great doctor, what day, what hour shall see this thing come to pass? Make haste with it, my child." "I hear and I obey!" said the other. "It shall be to-morrow."

Then he went down out of the palace and hiring a house filled it with his books, his cures, and aromatic plants. Then he made extracts of his drugs and simples; and, carving a short, curved, hollow mallet, placed them inside and then fitted a handle. Also he made a ball as skilfully as he was able. The next day, when his labours were completed, he went up into the palace and kissed the earth between the King's hands. Then he prescribed to the King that he should ride on his horse to the *maydan,* the polo ground; and exercise there with the mallet and the ball.

The king went there accompanied by his emirs, chamberlains, wazirs, and the chiefs of his kingdom; and was met at the *maydan* by Ruyan, the doctor, who gave him the mallet, saying: "Take this mallet and grip it in this way; then strike the ball as hard as you can. Go on doing this until both your palm and all your body sweat. In this way my cure will go in through your palm and travel throughout all your body. When you have sweated and the cure has had time to work, return to your palace and go at once to bathe at the Hammam. So shall you be cured. And in the meantime, peace be with you!"

Then King Yunan took the mallet, gripped it closely and, when his chosen cavaliers had mounted their horses and set the ball in motion, began to gallop after it, come up with it, hit it forward as hard as he could and gallop after it again. He did this until both his palm and all his body sweated, and the cure went in by his palm and travelled about his body. When the wise Ruyan saw that the cure had impregnated the whole body of the King he ordered him back to the palace. King Yunan therefore, returned and ordered the Hammam to be prepared. When the carpet-spreaders had made haste and the slaves hurried to prepare the linens and towels, the King bathed and, dressing himself at the Hammam, rode back to the palace and went to sleep.

In the meanwhile, Ruyan the physician slept in his house. As soon as he woke in the morning, he went up to the palace and, having gained admission, kissed the earth between the King's hands and began very solemnly to intone these lines:

"O chosen father of the sweet speech of kings,
Bright burning face that cools the red of the fire,
Face of young light, that shall behold undimmed
Time putting wrinkles in the face of time;
As a cool cloud covers a parched hill,
So you have covered me over with love-presents,
Who are yourself the peak of glory's hill,
Destiny's darling. She can refuse you nothing."

Hearing him say these verses, the King rose and threw himself upon the doctor's neck, made him sit by his side, and gave him robes of honour, magnificently worked.

For you must know that, when the King came out of the Hammam on the previous day, he looked upon his body and found no trace of the leprosy there; but rather that his skin had become pure and stainless as virgin silver. Therefore he had rejoiced as if his heart would break, walking with broadened breast and head held high. So it was that, with the coming of morning, when the King had entered the Diwan with his chamberlains and the great ones of his kingdom and Ruyan, the doctor, had presented himself, he rose hastily and made him sit by his side. Then slaves brought meats and draughts of good drink for these two throughout the day; and at nightfall the king gave the physician two thousand dinars over and above the robes of honour and the other presents he had made him, and set him upon his own horse. In such happy fashion, the physician took leave and returned to his own house.

As for the King, he was continuous in his admiration for the art of this physician and many times he said: "He has cured me from the outside of my body, not even smearing me with a salve. By Allah, so wonderful a science has he showed that the least of my duties is to overwhelm him with gifts and take him for my companion and great friend for ever." And that night King Yunan lay down to sleep in an ecstasy of joy, knowing that he was clean of body and cured of his evil.

Next morning when the King sat down upon his throne with the chiefs of the kingdom standing about him and the emirs and wazirs seated on his right and left, he called for Ruyan, who came and kissed the earth between his hands. Then the King rose as before and made the doctor sit down by him, eat with him, and gave him more robes of honour with other rich things, wishing him long life as he gave them. After, he talked with him until nightfall and gave him as a further fee five robes of honour and a thousand dinars. That night also the doctor returned to his house calling down blessings upon the King.

When the sun rose the next morning, the King came down and entered the Diwan, the emirs, wazirs and chamberlains clustering about him as before. Now among the wazirs there was one of repellent face and sinister expression; a cruel man of evil omen, grossly avaricious, an envious fellow, eaten out with jealousy. When this wazir saw the King raise up Ruyan to sit by him and giving presents to him, he became jealous and vowed the fall of this good man. The proverb says: "Each man envies, the strong openly, the weak in secret." The wazir came to the King and, kissing the earth said to him: "King of this hundred years and of all time, you who wrap all men in the garment of your benefits, I have in my heart a counsel of prodigious weight; nor would I be aught but a bastard and no true servant were I to hide it from you." Disturbed by these sinister words, the King commanded him to explain himself, and he went on: "O glorious king, the ancients had a saying: 'He who regards not the end and the consequence shall never thrive.' Now I have seen, and that even now, my lord, failing to regard the end and the consequence in making gifts to his enemy, to a man who desires the cutting off of his reign; yes, heaping him with generosities, smothering him with favours. Indeed, my lord, this makes me fear for the King's safety." At these words the

King became pale and agitated. At length he asked: "Who is this man you feign to be my enemy?" "If you are asleep, O King, I pray you wake. I speak of Ruyan, the doctor," said the wazir. "He is my friend," answered the King angrily. "Nearer to me than all men; for he gave me a thing to hold in my hand which took away my leprosy, and delivered me from an evil which no other physician might touch. In this time, in this world, neither in the East nor in the West, is there another like him. How dare you say these things of him? I tell you that from today I shall make him a salary and allowances so that he has a thousand dinars every month. Even if I gave him the half of my kingdom it would be a little thing for such as he. No, no, I am convinced that you have said all this out of jealousy, just as it happened in a tale they told me once, about King Sindabad!"

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and fell silent. Then Doniazade said to her: "Your words are sweet and pleasant to the taste." "But this is nothing," Shahrazade answered, "to that which I would tell you tomorrow night, if I were still alive, and the King wished to preserve me." Then the King said in his soul: "By Allah, I will not kill her until I have heard the rest of this truly marvellous tale!" They passed the rest of the night in each other's arms, and in the morning the King went down to the Hall of Justice. When the Diwan was filled with people, the King sat in judgment giving power and taking it away, guiding the people and making an end of the cases that were brought before him until the fall of day. Then when the Diwan rose, he went back to his palace and did as was his wont with Shahrazade, the daughter of the wazir.

And When
The Fifth Night
Had Come

Shahrazade said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that King Yunan said to his wazir: "You have let envy steal into your heart, my wazir, against this good physician. You are desirous that I should kill him and then repent, as King Sindabad repented after he had killed his falcon." "How did that come to pass?" asked the wazir.

So King Yunan began:

THE TALE OF KING SINDABAD & THE FALCON

They say that there was a king among the kings of the Fars who was a great lover of sport, of riding through the great gardens, and of all kinds of hunting. He had a falcon which he had trained himself and which never left him by day or night; for even during the night he carried it upon his fist and when he went hunting and coursing took it with him. He had also a little cup of gold hung from her neck at which she used to drink. One day, as he was sitting in his palace, his chief falconer approached him, saying: "King of the ages, the weather is just right for hunting." The King made ready and, taking his falcon, set out with a great company and came at length to a valley where they spread the hunting nets. Suddenly a gazelle fell into the nets, and the King said: "I will kill him who lets her pass." Then they began to narrow the hunting net about the gazelle so that she came near the king, and, standing on her hind legs, brought her fore-legs close to her chest, as if she wished to salute him. On this the King clapped his hands to frighten the gazelle and she leapt over his head and fled far away over the plain. Turning to his huntsmen, the King saw them winking at each other; so he asked his wazir why they were winking and the other answered; "I think they are reminding each other of what you said, that you would put anyone to death who let the gazelle pass." Then the King cried out: "By my life, we must follow this gazelle and bring her back!" So he galloped at full speed on her track and when he came up to her, the falcon struck her above the eyes with his beak, blinding and bewildering her; and the King took his mace and rolled her over with one blow. Then he dismounted to disembowel and flay the animal and afterwards hung the carcase on his saddle-horns. By this time, both the King and his horse had become faint from thirst, the day being very hot and the place a dry waterless desert; and, chancing to look around, the King saw a tree, down whose trunk water was falling as thick as butter. The King, who had his hands covered with leather gloves, took the cup from the falcon's neck, filled it with this water and placed it before the bird. But the falcon hit the cup with his claw and knocked it over. Again the King filled it and, still thinking that the bird was thirsty, placed it before him; but the falcon knocked it over a second time. Then the King became angry with the bird and, filling the cup a third time, held it out to his horse; but the falcon fluttered forward and knocked it over with his wing. "Allah entomb you, you ill-omened bird!" cried the King. "You have prevented me from drinking and the horse also, to say nothing of your silly self!" So he struck at the falcon with his sword and cut off both her wings. Then the falcon lifted its head up, as it were saying by signs: "Look up into the tree!" The King looked up and saw in the tree a knot of serpents, dripping their venom-like water down the trunk. Seeing this, he was sorrowful for what he had done and, mounting his horse, rode back to his palace. Arrived there, he threw the carcase of the gazelle to the cook, telling him to prepare it. Then he sat down, still with the falcon on his hand; but no sooner had he done so, than the bird gave a sob and fell dead. At this sight, the King uttered cries of lamentation and repentence that he had killed the bird who had saved him from a frightful death.

This is the tale of King Sindabad.

When the wazir heard the tale of King Yunan: "Great King, dignified Majesty," he said, "what evil have I ever done that had so sad an ending? Only out of love for my King have I spoken as I have; later you shall see the truth of my words. Hear me, and you are saved; regard me not, and I fear that you will perish as perished a certain treacherous wazir who harmed the son of a king."

THE TALE OF THE PRINCE AND THE OGRESS

THIS KING HAD a son much given to hunting and coursing; and he had also a wazir whom he had commanded to accompany his son wherever he went. One day the prince went out to hunt and course, taking his father's wazir with him; and both as they went saw a miraculous beast rise in their path. The wazir, who knew what manner of thing it was, yet shouted to the prince: "Forward, forward, after this noble beast and take her!" So the prince rode after the animal until it disappeared from view, somewhere in the desert; and the prince was at a loss, not knowing which way to go, until he saw a young girl weeping above the track which he followed. He asked her who she was and she answered: "I am the daughter of one of the Kings of Hind. While I journeyed over the desert with a caravan, sleep overcame me and I fell from my beast without any noticing. Now I am lost and alone and very sorrowful." When the prince heard this, he pitied her, and, setting her on his saddle-horn, rode away with her. As they were passing a little deserted ruin, the girl said: "Master, I must obey a call of nature." She went down into the ruin and the prince, after waiting and noticing that she was taking longer than was natural, went in after her without attracting her notice and behold! she had become an ogress and was saying to her brood: "Today, my dears, I have brought you a fine fat youth!" On this they shouted: "Bring him in, mother, bring him in, that we may eat our bellies-full!" When the prince heard these terrifying words, he gave himself up for lost. His muscles relaxed for very terror and he crawled from the ruin. When the ogress came out in her turn, she noticed his fear and trembling and said: "Why are you afraid?" He answered that he had an enemy; and the ogress asked: "Did you not tell me that you were a prince?" "That is true," he answered, and she continued: "If you are a prince, why do you not give money to your enemy and satisfy him?" "He would never be satisfied with money," answered the prince. "Never, I fear, with anything but my life. Thus it is I go in fear of my life and am the victim of an evil chance." To this she said: "If that is so, you have only to ask the help of Allah against your enemy and He will save you and deliver you from the malice of those you fear." Then the prince lifted up his head and prayed, saying: "O Thou, who answerest the oppressed when they call upon thee, give me to triumph over my enemy and in Thy might remove him from about my way!" When the ogress heard this prayer, she disappeared, and the prince returning to his father, the King, told him of the evil counsel of his wazir and the King put the wazir to death.

After this tale, the wazir of King Yunan continued in these subtle terms:

"But I fear, O King, that, if you put your trust in this doctor, he will make you die the worst of deaths. Even while you cover him with favours and make him your friend he is plotting your death. Do you not see why he has cured your illness from the outside of your body by means of a thing to hold in the hand? Do you not see that it is simply that he may later cause your death with another thing held in the hand?" "Indeed, what you say is true," agreed King Yunan. "Let all be done as you advise, O wazir of good counsel! It is more than likely that this doctor has come in secret as a spy, to cause my death. Since he cured me with a thing held in the hand, what is to prevent him killing me with some other thing, perhaps some scent that he will give me to smell? What should I do, O wazir?" "Send someone to fetch him at once," answered the wazir, "and, when he comes, have his head cut off at the neck; only thus can you put a stop to his evil plans and be care-free as you were before. Strike before he strikes: that is my advice!" "You have spoken well, O wazir!" said King Yunan, and he sent to fetch the doctor, who came quickly and cheerfully, not knowing what the Compassionate had in store for him. A poet has written these verses:

Go on your way and be comforted,
Child of the Faithful;
He who has moulded the world in His hands,
Holds it and us in his hands forever.
What He has written you cannot alter:
What He has not written, never shall be.
So go on your way and be comforted,
Child of the Faithful.

I keep the sweetness of my voice to sing to Him,
I make my fairest verses in His praise.
Rare and more rare fall his gifts about me,
Granted before I have the wit to ask them;
His kindness to me is greater than I can bear:
My voice is not sweet enough to sing of Him
And my verses are too little to hold His praise.

Walk on light-hearted, caring and carrying nothing,
Leaving all to Him.
Fear not what man may do, grieve not at sorrow,
Especially plan not, for He has planned all things.
Walk on light-hearted, caring and carrying nothing,
Leaving all to him.

When Ruyan, the physician, presented himself before the King, the latter asked him: "Do you know why I have sent for you?" And the physician answered: "None knows the unknown save Allah!" Then said the King: "I have sent for you that you may die." At these words, Ruyan was struck as by thunder and exclaimed: "Why should you kill me, O King? What harm have I done?" "They say you are a spy and have come here to kill me," answered the King. "Therefore will I strike the blow first!" Then raising his voice he cried to his executioner: "Strike through the neck of this traitor and rid me of his wiles!" "Spare me, and so shall Allah spare you!" cried the unfortunate doctor. "Kill me not, lest He also rise up and slay!"

He cried this prayer again and again, O Ifrit, just as I did with you. And you had no mercy upon me but continued hot for my death.

King Yunan said to the doctor: "Never will I have trust or peace again until I have killed you; for if you cured me with a thing held in the hand, doubtless you would kill me with a thing to smell, or in some other way." "Is this how you reward me?" asked the doctor. "Is this how you return me evil for my good?" But the King said: "You must die, there are no two ways about it." When the physician saw that the King was resolute for his death, he wept and repented bitterly of all the services he had done to those not worthy to receive them. Bearing on this subject, the poet said:

Although Maymunah was a fool
Her father kept the golden rule;
He had a torch to guide his feet
Through all the perils of the street.

After this the executioner advanced, bandaged the doctor's eyes, and, freeing his blade, asked leave of the King. But the doctor continued to weep and to reiterate: "Spare me, and so shall Allah spare you! Kill me not, lest He also rise up and slay!" Also he intoned these lines of the poet:

Fools take the prize
  And cruelty lives on,
While wisdom dies
  And kindness is undone.

If I come free
I'll swear to change my ways,
And practise ignorance and cruelty
Through all my days.

Then he said to the King: "Is this my reward? You are treating me after the manner of a certain crocodile." Then the King asked: "What is this tale of the crocodile?" And the doctor answered: "Indeed, indeed, I cannot tell you tales while I am in this sorry state. I conjure you, by Allah, save me and so shall Allah preserve you at the last." Then he began to weep again, very sorrowfully.

At this point, some of the King's favourites rose and said to him: "Spare, we beseech you, O King, the life of this great and good physician, for we have seen no fault in him against you; but rather have we seen him cure you of an evil which neither doctors nor sages were able to touch."

But the King answered them: "You know not the reason of this doctor's death; if I spared him I should myself be lost, for he who has cured me by a thing held in the hand might well kill me by giving me something to smell. Also I fear that he would kill me for some reward set upon my life, for he is probably a spy come here for no other reason but to kill me. His death is necessary. I shall have peace again." Then the doctor called out again: "Spare me, and so shall Allah spare you! Kill me not, lest He also rise up and slay!"

Now know, O Ifrit, that when the physician was finally certain that the King would kill him, he said: "King, if my death is really necessary, at least allow me a delay for going down to my house. I must put my affairs in order, instruct my family and my neighbours to arrange my funeral, and, above all, I must give away my books of medicine. Also, now that I think of it, I have indeed a book that is the extract of extracts, the rarity of rarities in science, and I would offer it to you that you may keep it carefully for ever among your chests of books." So the King asked him what this book might be and he made answer: "It holds devices that are above price, the least of its secrets being this: if, when my head is off, you turn three pages of the book, then read three lines upon the left-hand page, my severed head will speak and answer any manner of question!" The King trembled with joyful amazement at these words, and said: "Doctor, is this true? Even if I cut your head off will you speak?" "Indeed it is true, my King," he answered. "It is one of the prodigies of my science." After this, the King let him go down to his house between guards; and on that day and the next he wound up his affairs. When he came back to the Diwan, it was like a garden full of flowers with the coloured clothes of the emirs, the wazirs, the chamberlains, the nawabs, and all the chief persons of the kingdom. First the physician stood before the King, holding a very old book and a little box of kohl, in which there was a powder. Then he sat down and said: "Let someone bring me a plate!" A plate was brought to him; and he poured the powder on to it, smoothing it over the surface with his fingers. Finally he said: "Take this book, my King, but do not use it until you have cut off my head. When my head is off, set it upon this plate and have it pressed down firm upon the powder to stop the bleeding. After that open the book."

But the King in his haste hardly listened to him: he took the book and, opening it, found that the pages were stuck together. So he put his finger to his mouth, wetted it with his spittle, and succeeded in opening the first leaf. He did the same with the second and the third, experiencing great difficulty each time. When six single sheets had been opened in this way, he tried to read but could find no manner of writing in the book. "There is nothing written here," he cried, and the doctor answered: "Go on turning." So the King went on turning the leaves but hardly had a minute passed when the venom (for the leaves of the book were indeed poisoned) began to work in the blood and body of the King. He fell back in terrible convulsions, crying: "Poisoned! Poisoned!" And Ruyan, the physician, addressed him, extemporising these lines:

When the unjust judge
Without justice judges,
Horrible, horrible things are done;
But more horrible things are done
When justice judges
The unjust judge.

As Ruyan made an end of his verses, the King fell back dead.

Learn from this, O you Ifrit, that if King Yunan had preserved Ruyan, the physician, Allah would have preserved him in his turn. But he refused and brought about his own death. And you, if you had wished to preserve me, Allah would have preserved you.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the coming of morning and discreetly fell silent. Then her sister Doniazade said: "How pleasant are your words!" "They are nothing," she answered, "to that which I would tell you tomorrow night if I were still alive and the King wished to spare me." After this, they spent the night in complete joy and happiness until the morning. Finally the King went up to his Diwan; and, when the Diwan had risen, returned to his own palace and his people.

And When
The Sixth Night
Had Come

SHAHRAZADE said:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that when the fisherman said to the Ifrit: "If you had preserved me, I would now preserve you; but as you wished my death, I shall throw you into the sea and leave you to die imprisoned in this jar." Then the Ifrit cried: "For the love of Allah, do not do this thing! Release me, out of your generosity, not blaming me too much for what I did. If I was evil, be thou good. Does not the proverb say: 'He who requites a fault with kindness at the same time pardons the evil'? Do not to me as Uman did to Atika." "What was their story?" asked the fisherman. "This jar is no place for telling tales in," answered the Ifrit. "When you let me out I will tell you what happened between them." "No, no," said the fisherman, "I must cast you into the sea, so that you shall never come up out of it again. For by your way of treating me, I know that you come of an evil race." But the Ifrit cried: "Release me, and I will not only tell you the story, but I will promise never to do you hurt and, moreover, I will bring you into the way of great riches." Then the fisherman trusted him and, being assured of his good faith, after making him swear in the name of Allah, he opened the jar.

Out rose the smoke from the jar and again became an Ifrit of immortal ugliness, who with a mighty kick sent the jar flying out to sea. When he saw the jar disappearing in the water, the fisherman piddled his garments in an ecstasy of fear, saying: "This is no good sign!" Then to reassure himself he thus addressed the Jinni: "Allah, Most High, has said, O Ifrit: 'Stand by your oaths or I will call you to account!' You both promised and swore that you would not harm me. Be certain, then, that if you do harm me, Allah will punish you; for he is a jealous God, and, if he bides His time, yet does He not forget. Remember I said to you, as Ruyan the physician said to King Yunan: 'Spare me, and Allah shall spare you!' "

At these words, the Ifrit burst out laughing and walked away, telling the fisherman to follow him. Still in uncertainty, the fisherman walked behind; and in this order they left the city behind till it was out of sight and, climbing a mountain, came down over the other side into a great deserted valley, in the middle of which was a lake. Here the Ifrit stopped and ordered the fisherman to cast his net; and the latter, looking down in the water, saw fish, white, red, blue, and yellow, swimming about in it. Marvelling at this sight, he cast his net and caught four fish each of a different colour. As he was rejoicing at his good fortune, the Ifrit said: "Take these fish to the Sultan's palace and he will make you a rich man. In the meantime, I must ask you to excuse me; I fear I have forgotten my manners during my long sojourn below the sea, never looking upon the land for eighteen hundred years. I advise you to come and fish here every day, but only once a day. Finally, Allah be good to you, and farewell!" With this the Ifrit stamped both his feet against the earth, which opened and swallowed him up.

Marvelling at all that had befallen him, the fisherman returned towards the city, and coming to his house with the fish, filled an earthen pot with water and placed them in it. When they began to swim about in the water, he put the pot upon his head and walked with it to the palace, as the Ifrit had told him. When the fisherman came into the presence of the King and offered him the fish, the King, who had never seen the like either in size or colour, marvelled exceedingly and commanded that the fishes should be given to the black cook-maid. You must know that this slave had been given him as a present three days before by the King of Roum and that so far he had had no occasion to sample her cooking. So the wazir took the fish to the cook-maid and told her to fry them, adding: "Excellent negress, the King my master sent you this message: 'I have reserved you specially, O tear of mine, for some great day. Give us proof, now, of your excellence with the cookpots and the luxury of your dishes, for today the sultan entertains one who brings gifts to him.'" Then the wazir returned to the King who ordered him to give the fisherman four hundred dinars. Having received this sum, the fisherman placed it in the tail of his robe and returned contentedly to his wife at home. We will leave him buying all manner of necessities for his children.

In the meanwhile, the cook-maid cleaned the fishes, put them in the pan and, when they were well cooked on one side, turned them over. But suddenly the wall of the kitchen opened and through it entered a young and slender girl with full smooth cheeks and delightful features. Her eyelids were darkened with black kohl and her body bent daintily with the weight of her breasts. On her head she wore a kerchief of blue silk from which her hair escaped about her ears: she had gold bracelets round her wrists, and on her fingers rich and coloured stones sparkled from rings. She came forward to the fire and, thrusting a bamboo wand she carried in her hand, into the pan, said: "Fish, fish, are you faithful?" Seeing this the cook-maid fainted away and the young girl repeated her question a second and third time. Then all the fish lifted their heads from inside the pan and cried: "Yes, yes, we are!" Then in chorus they intoned these lines:

Come back and so will we,
Keep faith, and we'll keep faith;
But if you show us treachery
It shall be to your scathe.

At these words the young girl upset the pan and passed out by the way she had come, the wall of the kitchen coming together again after her. When the cook-maid came out of her swoon, she saw that the four fishes had fallen into the fire and been burnt to black cinders. And calling out: "Oh, even at the first assault his vigour ebbed away!" she continued to lament until the wazir came back and told her to carry the fishes to the sultan. At this the cook-maid burst into tears and told the wazir all that had happened. The wazir, utterly amazed at the strangeness of the thing, sent for the fisherman and commanded him to bring four other fishes of the same kind. So the fisherman made his way to the mountain lake and, casting his net, brought four more fish to land. These he took to the wazir who, in his turn, took them to the cook-maid and said: "Stir yourself now and fry these in my presence, that I may see what there is in this story of yours." The negress cleaned the fish and set them in a pan on the fire; but hardly had she done so when the wall opened and the young girl appeared a second time, dressed as before and still holding the wand in her hand. She thrust the wand into the pan, saying: "Fish, fish, are you faithful?"; whereupon the fishes lifted their heads and intoned these lines in chorus:

Come back and so will we,
Keep faith, and we'll keep faith;
But if you show us treachery
It shall be to your scathe.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and fell silent.

And When
The Seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that when the fishes spoke in this manner the young girl upset the pan with her wand and departed by the fissure in the wall which closed after her. "This is a thing that we can in no wise keep from the King!" exclaimed the wazir; so he sought out the King and told him the whole circumstances. "This is a thing that I must see for myself!" cried the King; and, sending for the fisherman, he commanded him to fetch four other fish of the like kind, allowing him three days in which to complete the matter. But the fisherman hurried to the lake and came back immediately with four more fish, for which he was given four hundred dinars at the King's command. Then the King commanded his wazir to prepare the fish himself in the royal presence. "I hear and I obey," answered the wazir, and conducting the King to the kitchen, he carefully cleaned the fish and, in the King's sight, set them in the pan to fry. When they were cooked on one side, he turned them; and immediately the kitchen wall opened and through it entered a negro, as ugly as a great buffalo or one of the giants of the tribe of Had. He carried a green branch in his hand and said in a distinct and terrible voice: "Fish, fish, are you faithful?" Then all the fish lifted their heads from inside the pan and cried: "Yes, yes, we are!" and in chorus they intoned these lines:

Come back and so will we,
Keep faith, and we'll keep faith;
But if you show us treachery
It shall be to your scathe.

Then the negro came up to the pan and upset it with his green branch, so that the fish fell and were burnt to black cinders. Finally he departed by the way he had come and the King said: "Here is a matter on which it is impossible to keep silent. Surely there is some strange tale connected with these fishes?" So he sent for the fisherman and asked him where the fishes came from. "From a lake between four hills," he answered, "behind the mountain which looks down upon your city." "How many days' journey is it?" asked the King. "My lord, it is not more than half an hour away," the other answered. Then the sultan set out forthwith, taking his soldiers with him, and also the fisherman, who went along in a confused state of mind, secretly cursing the Ifrit. At length the King's party passed over the mountain and came down into a desert valley, such as they had never seen before. They marvelled at it, and at the lake, and at the fish of different colours, red, white, yellow and blue, which swam within it. Halting his men, the King asked if anyone there had ever seen a lake in that place; and when all answered that they had not, he said: "As Allah lives, I will never more go back to my city or sit upon my throne until I have found out the truth about this lake and these strange fishes!" Then, sending out his men to inspect the mountains round about, he called his wazir to him, who was a scholar and a sage, an eloquent man of great learning. To him the King said: "There is a thing that I mean to do and I must tell you of it. I have determined to go forth alone tonight and seek out unaided the answer to the mystery of this lake. Your part will be to stand guard at the door of my tent and tell any wazirs, emirs, or chamberlains, who may seek audience, that I am ill and have given order that no one may be admitted. Above all tell no one of my plan." The wazir promised to obey and the King, having disguised himself and girt on his sword, slipped out unperceived from among his bodyguard. All that night and through the next morning, he journeyed on, stopping only to sleep through the noon-day heat. Then he continued his quest throughout the rest of that day and the following night. On the second morning he saw a black object far off and joyfully exclaimed: "Surely yonder I shall find someone to tell me the story of the lake!" Coming nearer, he saw that the thing was a palace, built all of black stones, fastened together with great clamps of steel. Stopping at the mighty double door, one half of which was open, he knocked softly, once, twice, and again, without receiving any answer. The fourth time, he knocked with great violence and still no one came. So, supposing the palace was deserted, he plucked up his courage and entered. Arrived at the central corridor, he called in a loud voice: "O masters of this palace, I am a stranger, a wayfarer, and I come to ask a little refreshment in my journey!" He repeated this twice more and, getting no reply, became emboldened to go along the corridor as far as the very centre of the palace. Here he found no one; though all the place was splendid with star-wrought tapestries and, in the middle of the inner court, four lions of red gold held up a fountain, spraying so fair a water that it had the appearance of diamonds and white pearls. About the court were many birds, which could not fly away because of a great golden net stretched above the palace. The King marvelled at all these things and yet he grieved in his heart to find no one there who could explain the riddle of the lake, the mountain, the fish, and the palace. Soon he sat down between two of the doors in a profound reverie, which was suddenly cut short by a feeble voice of complaint, rising it seemed from a surcharged heart. He heard these lines sung in a sweet whisper:

I could not keep love down:
He rose and pinned my sleepy eyes awake,
He crept into my voice and made it break,
My heart, and made it ache.

I could not keep love down:
He rose and lighted fires within my brain,
And all the waters of the world are vain
To put them out again.

Moving towards the sound of this low plaining, the King found a door covered by a curtain. Lifting the curtain, he saw a young man, lying upon his elbow on a great bed in a mighty hall. He was fair and supple, dowered with the very voice of music; his brow was like a flower, and his cheeks like the flowers of roses. Also, on one of these cheeks there lay a mole like a fragment of black amber. The poet has said:

Sweet and slim is the boy
With hair of shadows paling the night
And a brow of light
Making the stars seem grey.
My eyes have turned his way
And found a joy
Of which I dare not speak
In a nut-brown beauty spot
The boy has got
Below his dark eye on his rose-leaf cheek.

The King rejoiced at the sight of the young man, and said to him: "Peace be with you!" But the youth, who wore a robe of golden embroidered silk, did not move from his position on the bed and it was with great sorrow both of voice and feature that he greeted the King, saying: "Excuse me, my lord, for not rising." Thereupon, the King said: "Tell me, O fair young man, the story of the lake and the coloured fishes; and also the reason of this palace and of your solitude and your tears." At these words, the youth wept even more sorely, and answered: "What is there in the evil fate that has come upon me that I should not weep?" So saying, he moved his thin hand towards the skirts of his garment and lifted them away from his body. Then the King saw that the lower half of this youth was all of marble, while the upper half of his body, from his navel to the hair upon his head, remained that of a man. As he stood there astonished, the young man said to him: "You must know, my lord, that the tale of the fishes is indeed a strange tale. Were it written with a bodkin on the inner corner of an eye, yet would it be a lesson for a man of mind."

And the youth told this story:

THE TALE OF THE YOUNG MAN AND THE FISHES

Know, my lord, that my father was the King of a city which you see not and yet it was here. His name was Mahmud, and he was master of the Black Isles, which are now four mountains. He reigned for seventy years before passing to the mercy of Allah, Remunerator of the world. After his death, I became sultan and took to wife my cousin, the daughter of my uncle, who so well loved me that if I left her even for a short while she neither ate nor drank till my return. For five years I cherished her until a day came when she went to the hammam, after having ordered an alluring supper for us from the cook. Then I entered this hall of my palace and lay down to sleep in my accustomed place, ordering two of my girl slaves to move their fans above me as I slept. One sat at my head and the other at my feet; but I could not sleep for thinking of my wife and, though my eyelids closed, my wits remained alert. Thus it was that I heard the slave at my head say to the other at my feet: "How ill-starred is the youth of our poor lord, Mas'udah. How sad it is that he should have married our mistress." "God's curse on all adulteresses!" the other replied, "this bastard who spends her nights in every vagabond bed, is a millionfold too evil to be the wife of our master." "And yet," said the first slave, "He must be very innocent not to notice the woman's goings on." "How can you say that?" objected the other, "What chance does she give him to suspect her? Why, every night she puts something into the wine he drinks before he sleeps. She mixes *banj* with the drink and he sleeps like the dead. How then can he know what she does or where she goes? After making him drink the drugged wine, she dresses and goes out and stays away till morning. When she comes back, she burns a scented something below his nose and he wakes fresh from his sleep."

My lord, when I heard the conversation of these slaves, light became darkness before my eyes, and yet in my impatience I thought that night would never fall. At last, however, my wife came back from the hammam; and, spreading the cloth, we ate for an hour, giving each other drink as was our custom. When I asked for the final cup which I drank every night before my sleep, and she handed it to me, I put it to my lips, but instead of drinking, spilled it secretly into the upper fold of my robe. At once I lay down on my bed and feigned to go to sleep. Then I heard her saying: "Sleep, you devil, sleep, and never wake. As Allah lives, I hate you, yes, every inch of you; and my soul sickens when you are near!" After this she rose, dressed herself in her finest garments, perfumed herself, girt on my sword and left the palace. Instantly I rose and followed her. She crossed all the markets of the city and, coming at last to the outer gates, spoke to them in a tongue I did not understand and, lo! the locks fell from their places, the gates swung open of themselves and she went out beyond the city. I followed her unnoticed till she came to certain mounds formed by the heaping up of refuse, in the middle of which was a roundhouse built of dry mud and topped by a dome of the same. This place she entered by a door and I, climbing up into the balcony of the dome, lay still to watch. I saw her enter below into the room of a hideous coal-black negro, whose upper lip was like the lid of a stew-pot and his lower lip like the stew-pot itself; great pendulous lips they were, that could have sorted pebbles from the sand of the floor. He, most loathsome of creatures, lay on a heap of refuse of sugar-cane. Seeing him, my wife, the daughter of my uncle, kissed the earth between his hands; and he, lifting up his head, addressed her thus: "Curse you, why are you so late? I have had other black men here, drinking wine and having their girls. But I had not the heart to drink because you were not here." "Master, darling of my heart, do you not know that I am now married to my cousin, the son of my uncle; that I hate the least detail of his face and am filled with horror to be near him? Ah, if it were not for fear that you would come to harm, I should long ago have destroyed his city, from pinnacle to base, leaving but the voices of owls and of crows to be heard in her streets, hurling the stones of her ruin beyond the mountain of Kaf!" "You lie, you bitch," the negro answered, "and I swear to you on the honour and the great faith of black men, on our mighty superiority over all whites, that if you are late once again after today I will throw you aside as false to him who should be master. Unfaithful whore, filth, foulest of white girls, you are only late because you have been with someone else."

My lord, continued the prince, you can believe that, when I heard with my own ears this fearful conversation and saw with my own eyes what followed between the two, the world grew very black before my face and I knew not where I was. Then my wife, my cousin, wept in terrible humility before the negro, saying: "Lover, fruit of my heart, there is none but you; dear boy, dear light of life, send me not away!" When at last he pardoned her because of her weeping, she was filled with joy and, rising to her feet, removed her vestments. She stood before him thus and I saw her from my hiding on the balcony of the dome. Then she said: "Master, have you no refreshments for your slave?" "Look in the pot," answered the other, "You'll find a stew of rat's bones, and there is some stale beer which you may drink." When she had eaten and drunken, she washed her hands and approached the negro lying on his bed of trash.

When I saw this, I could contain myself no longer; jumping from the dome, I rushed into the room and snatched the sword which my wife was carrying, determined to kill them both. First I slashed the negro across his neck and thought that I had killed him.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent. When day had come, King Shahryar entered his hall of justice, and the Diwan sat until nightfall. Then the King returned to his palace, and Doniazade said to her sister: "I pray you go on with your story." "With all my heart and as in duty bound," she answered.

And When
The Eighth Night
Had Come

She continued:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the young man who was bewitched went on with his story in this fashion:

When I slashed the negro across the neck I severed his windpipe, both the skin and flesh of it, and thought that I had killed him, because a high and terrible cry came from him. I rushed away, and my wife, daughter of my uncle, who had been sleeping, rose, took up and sheathed the sword and, returning to the city, stole into the palace and lay down by me in my bed till morning. Next day, I saw that she had cut off her hair and put on mourning garments. This she explained to me by saying: ''Husband, son of my uncle, do not blame me for what I have done. I have just heard that my mother is dead, that my father has been killed in the holy war, that one of my brothers has been stung to death by a scorpion, and the other buried alive by the fall of a huge building. It is only right that I should weep and mourn.'' Not wishing to seem as if I had noticed anything untoward, I answered: ''Do what you think necessary; I shall not stop you.'' So it came about that she stayed shut in with her tears, her insane ecstasy of grief for a whole year. At the end of that time, she said: ''Husband, I wish a tomb built in your palace, in the form of a pillared dome. There I can shut myself, in solitude and tears, and call the name of it the House of Mourning.'' ''Do what you think necessary,'' I answered. So she had her House of Mourning built with the dome above it and a tomb as big as a water-ditch inside. To this place she had the negro carried. For he was not dead, though very ill and feeble, and quite unable to be of any delight to my wife. Still this did not prevent him from drinking both wine and beer at all hours of the day. From the time of his wound he had not been able to speak; and now he lived on in the tomb because his time had not yet come. Each day my wife would go in under the dome, at dawn and nightfall, and fall to raving and weeping. Also she gave soups and strong broths to the man inside. She behaved in this way, morning and night, for the whole of a second year; while I abode here patiently. But one day, coming upon her unawares, I found her weeping and striking her face and, in a sad voice, saying these verses:

When you passed out by my tent door
I said good-bye to all the world,
Forgetting how to love for ever more
When you passed out.

If you come back the way you went
I pray you take my body up,
And set it in a calm grave near your tent
When you come back.

If your dear voice recall the tones,
The sweetness of the way you said my name;
Kneel down, dear love, and say the same:
I'll answer with the clicking of my bones.

When she had finished this plaint of hers, I drew my sword and cried: "O you unfaithful, these are the words of a naughty passion and not of grief! I was the more deceived." I raised my arm and was about to strike, when she jumped to her feet and, understanding it would seem for the first time that it was I who had wounded her negro, muttered strange unknown words which must have meant: "By my dark power, God turn you half to stone!" And at that moment, my lord, I became as you see me now. I could not move about; nay, could not stir myself an inch; but I lie here, neither dead nor alive. After she had done this horrible thing to me, she bewitched the four isles of my kingdom, turning them to mountains with a lake between, and all my people into fishes in the lake. But this is not all. Every day she comes to torture me and give me a hundred lashes with a leather thong. After she has done this, she puts a shirt of hair next to my skin under my clothes, all over the upper sentient part of me.

At this stage in his tale, the young man burst into tears and moaned these lines:

I have waited upon His justice,
I have tarried for the pleasure of my God
And the time of His coming to judgment.
Though my afflictions rise about me like trees,
I look for the deliverance of the sword of Allah
With patient eyes.

The King turned to the young man and said: "Your story has added a sorrow to my sorrows. Tell me, where is this woman?" "With the negro in the tomb under the dome," he answered. "Each day she comes to me, beating me as I have said and I cannot stir an inch to help myself. Then she goes back to her negro, night and morning, with wines and broth." "As Allah lives, my brave young man," exclaimed the King, "now must I do you a service that will be remembered, a benefit that shall pass into the books of history!" After talking with the prince till nightfall, the King rose and, on the striking of the night hour of wizardry, undressed, girt on his sword, and stole towards the negro's tomb. In it, he saw lighted candles and hanging lamps; incense and perfumes and all unguents. Without delay, he smote the negro with his sword and, when he was dead, lifted him upon his back, and hurled his body to the bottom of a certain well which was in the palace. Then he came back, put on the negro's clothes, and walked up and down below the dome, waving his great and naked sword.

After an hour, the wanton sorceress came into the young prince, her husband; and, baring his body, lashed him cruelly. When he cried out: "Aie, aie, enough, for pity's sake, enough!" she answered: "Pity? What pity had you for me and for my lover?" After this, she wrapped him in a goat's hair shirt, replacing his other clothes on top of it, and went to visit her negro, carrying a cup of wine and a bowl of vegetable soup. Entering under the dome, she wept, saying: "Speak to me, O my master, let me hear your voice!" Then in deep grief she intoned these lines:

If you desire these sweet fain limbs of mine
To comfort you like wine,
Turn not aside;
But if you lust after my misery,
My torment, and not me,
Be satisfied.

Finishing, she burst into sobs and repeated: "Speak to me, O my master!" Then the supposed negro, putting his tongue across his mouth, so that he should sound like a black man, called out: "Aha, there is no strength nor power save in Allah!" When she heard him speak, who had so long been silent, she shouted with joy and fainted away. But coming to herself she said: "Praise be, praise be, my master is himself again!" Then said the King in a disguised and feeble voice: "O curse of mine, you have not merited a word from me!" "How is that?" said she. And the King answered: "You lash your husband every day, so that his groans and cries for help take all my sleep away from me at night; he weeps for mercy, so that I cannot sleep. If it had not been so, I should have been cured long before this." "Since you order it," she said, "I am willing to save him from his present state.'' ''Do so,'' said the King, ''And let us have a little peace.'' Murmuring: ''I hear, and I obey!'' she rose and left the dome. Arrived at the great hall, she took a copper bowl filled with water, and said magic words over it. When the water began to boil and bubble as if it had been in a fiery cauldron, she sprinkled the prince with it, saying: ''By these words that I have uttered, by this spell that I have muttered, turn to what you were before!'' At this, the young man shivered and rose upright upon his feet, shouting for joy and crying: ''There is no other God but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet, whom Allah bless and keep!'' ''Go,'' shrieked his wife in his very face, ''and never return, or I shall kill you!'' The young man slipped away from the palace and his wife, going back to the dome, called softly: ''Rise up, my master, that I may look upon you!'' In a very feeble voice, came this answer: ''You have done nothing yet; you have hardly restored a twentieth of my peace, for the main cause of my trouble still remains.'' ''What is this main cause, my darling?'' she asked. ''The fish in the lake, the people of this ancient city and of the Four Isles,'' he answered. ''At midnight every night, they lift their heads out of the lake and pray down curses upon you and me. I cannot get well while this goes on. Deliver them, my dear, and then come back to take me by the hand and help me rise, for surely then I shall be whole and well.'' Thinking he was the negro, she answered cheerfully: ''Master, your wish is as the law of my head and the object of my eye. Bismillah!'' Saying this, she rose and ran and coming to the lake, took up a little of the water and . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Ninth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the young witch took up a little water out of the lake and said over it certain words, the fishes wriggled and trembled in the water and lifted their heads and became men again. The magic that had held them slacked off from the bodies of the people; and their place became again a great and flourishing city with mighty markets; and each man in it went about his business and concern. The mountains became again the islands of old time and the woman ran back again to the King. Still thinking him the negro, she said: "Give me your generous hand, my darling, that I may kiss it." "Come near me, then," answered the King, in a low voice. So she came near and he, lifting his good sword, pierced her through the breast so that the point came out behind her back. He struck her again, and cut her into two halves; which done, he went out of that place and found the young man, who had been bewitched, waiting for him outside. He congratulated him on his deliverance and the young man kissed his hands and thanked him heartily. Later the King asked: "Do you wish to stay in your own city, or come with me to mine?" "King of all time," answered the young man, "do you know how far your city is from here?" "Two and a half days' journey," said the King. Then the young man laughed and said: "If you are sleeping, my king, wake up. Even with Allah speeding the journey, it would take you a year to get to your own city. If you came here in two days and a half, it was because my kingdom was contracted and bewitched. As for your question, know that I shall never leave you, even for the winking of an eye.'' The King rejoiced at this and cried: ''Praise be to Allah, who sets you upon my road! Henceforth you shall be my son, for He has not blessed me with a child of my own.'' So they fell upon each other's necks and rejoiced exceedingly.

Going up to the palace, the King who had been spellbound, made proclamation to the chief men of his kingdom that he was about to set out upon the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca. When all the necessary preparations had been made, he and the sultan set out, the heart of the latter burning for his kingdom, from which he had been absent a whole year. They journeyed with a troop of fifty mamelukes charged with gifts and rarities; and halted not, night or day, for a whole year, until they came in sight of the sultan's city. On their approach, the wazir, and all the fighting men came out to meet their King, whom they had never thought to look upon again. They came near and kissed the earth between his hands, giving him welcome. The King went up into his palace, sat upon his throne and, calling the wazir to him, told him all that had happened. Hearing the strange adventures of the young man, the wazir congratulated him upon his deliverance and present safety.

After he had given audience and gifts to many, the King said to his wazir: ''Send quickly for the fisherman who brought the fishes which were the cause of all these things.'' The wazir sent and fetched the fisherman, who had in truth delivered the inhabitants of that other city, and the King presented him with robes of honour, questioning him about his manner of life and asking him if he had any children. When the fisherman answered that he had one son and two daughters, the King straightway married one of the two daughters himself, and the prince married the other. Their father the King kept in his train and made him treasurer-in-chief of all the kingdom. The wazir he appointed sultan of the prince's city and of the Black Islands, sending him thither with the same fifty mamelukes and many robes of honour for all the emirs of that land. The wazir kissed his King's hand and departed to take up his own kingdom; while the sultan and the prince lived together in joy and contentment. As for the fisherman, thanks to his position as treasurer-in-chief, he soon became the richest man of all that century; and his daughters were the wives of kings, even till the day of their deaths.

But do not believe, said Shahrazade, that this tale is at all more wonderful than the tale of the Porter.

THE TALE OF THE PORTER AND THE YOUNG GIRLS

There was once a young man in the city of Baghdad, who was by faith a bachelor and by trade a porter.

One day, as he was leaning idly against his basket in the market place, a woman, wearing a full veil of Mosul silk, tasselled with gold and turned with rare brocade, stopped before him and raised the veil a little from her face. Above it there showed dark eyes with long lashes of silk and lids to set a man dreaming. Her body was slight, her feet were very small, and clear perfection shone about her. She said—and oh, but her voice was sweet—"Take up your basket, porter, and follow me." Hardly believing that so exquisite words could have been said to him, the porter took up his basket and followed the girl, who stopped eventually before the door of a house. She knocked at the door and immediately a Christian opened to her, who gave her, in exchange for a dinar, a great measure of olive-clear wine which she put into the basket, saying to the porter: "Lift and follow me." "By Allah, this is a day of days!" exclaimed the porter, as he lifted his basket and followed the girl. Arrived at the stall of a fruiterer, she bought Syrian apples, Osmani quinces, peaches from Oman, jasmin of Aleppo, Damascene nenuphars, cucumbers from the Nile, limes from Egypt, Sultani citrons, myrtle berries, flowers of henna, blood-red anemones, violets, pomegranate bloom, and the narcissus. All these she put into the porter's basket, and said: "Lift!"; so he lifted and followed her until she came to a butcher's stall. Here she said: "Cut me ten pounds of mutton." So they cut her ten pounds which she wrapped in banana leaves and put into the basket, and said: "Lift!" He lifted and followed her to an almond seller, from whom she bought every kind of almond that there is. Then the porter followed her to a sweetmeat seller from whom she bought a great platter which she covered with things from the stall; open-work sugar tarts with butter, velvet pastries perfumed with musk and stuffed deliciously, *saboun* biscuits, small cakes, lime tarts, honey-tasting jam, those sweets called *mouchabac,* little souffléd patties, called *loucmet-el-cadi,* and those others named *assabihzeinab* which are made with butter and mingled with milk and honey. All these pleasant things she put upon the platter and then placed the platter in the basket. "If you had told me, I would have brought a mule," said the porter. Smiling at his jest, she stopped at the stall of a distiller of perfumes and bought ten sorts of waters, rose water, water of orange flowers, willow flower, violet and other kinds; she bought also a spray of rose-musk scented water, grains of male incense, aloe wood, ambergris and musk; finally she selected candles of Alexandrian wax and put all in the basket, saying: "Lift and follow!" Obediently the porter took up his basket and followed the young lady until she came to a splendid palace, having a great court set in an inner garden; it was tall, magnificent and four-square and the door had two leaves of ebony, plated with plates of red gold.

The young girl rapped gently upon the door and it flew wide open. Then the porter looked at her who had opened the door and saw that she was a child having a slim and gracious body, the very model of all a young girl should be, not only for her round and prominent breasts, not only for her beauty and her air of breeding, but also for the perfection of her waist and of her carriage. Her brow was as white as the first ray fallen from the new moon, her eyes were the eyes of a gazelle, and the brows above them were as the crescent moons of Ramadan. Her cheeks were anemones, her mouth the scarlet seal of Sulayman, her face pale as the full moon when she first rises above the grasses, her breasts twin passion-fruit. As for her young pliant body, it lay hid beneath her robe like some precious love letter in a silken case. Seeing her, the porter felt that he was losing his wits and nearly let the basket slip from his shoulders. "As Allah lives, this is the most blessed day of all my life!" he said. Standing within, the young portress said to her sister the cateress and also to the porter: "Enter, and be your welcome as great as it is good!"

They went in and came at last to an ample hall giving on the central court, hung over with silk brocade and gold brocade, and full of fair gold-crusted furniture. There were vases and carved seats, curtains and close shut presses all about it, and in the middle a marble couch, inlaid with pearl and diamond, covered with a red satin quilt. On the bed lay a third girl who exceeded all the marvel that a girl can be. Her eyes were Babylonian, for all witchcraft has its seat in Babylon. Her body was slim as the letter *alif*, her face so fair as to confuse the bright sun. She was as a star among the shining of the stars, a true Arabian woman, as the poet says:

Who sings your slender body is a reed,
His simile a little misses;
Reeds must be naked to be fair indeed,
While your sweet garments are but added blisses.

Who sings your body is a slender bough
Also commits a kindred folly;
Boughs to be fair must have green leaves enow
And you, my white one, must be naked wholly.

The young girl got up from the bed, moved a few paces into the middle of the hall until she was near her two sisters and said to them: "Why are you standing still like this? Take the basket from the porter's head." Then the cateress came in front of the porter, the portress came behind him and, helped by their third sister, they relieved him of his burden. When they had taken everything out of the basket, they arranged all neatly and gave two dinars to the porter, saying: "Turn and begone, O porter!" But he looked at the young girls, admiring the perfection of their beauty and thought that he had never seen the like. He noticed that there was no man with them and, marvelling at all the drinks, fruits, perfumed flowers, and other good things, had no desire to go away.

The eldest of the girls said: "Why do you not go? Do you find your payment too little?" and, then turning to her sister the cateress: "Give him a third dinar." But the porter said: "As Allah lives, fair ladies, my ordinary pay is but two half dinars; you have paid me well enough and yet all my heart and the inner parts of my soul are troubled about you. I cannot help asking myself what this life of yours is, that you live alone and have no man here to bear you human company. Do you not know that a minaret is of no value unless it be one of the four minarets of a mosque? You are but three, my ladies, you need a fourth. Women cannot be truly happy without men. The poet has said: 'There can be no harmony save with four joined instruments; the lute, the harp, cithern and flagiolet.' Now you are only three, my ladies; you need a flagiolet, a fourth instrument, a man of discretion, full both of sentiment and intellect, a gifted artist with sealed lips!"

"But, porter," said the young girls, "do you not know that we are virgins and so are fearful of confiding ourselves to the indiscretion of a man? We also have read the poets, and they say: 'Confide in none; a secret told is a secret spoiled.'"

Hearing this, the porter cried: "I swear on your dear lives, my ladies, I am a man sure, faithful, and discreet, one who has studied the annals and read books. I speak of only pleasing things and am carefully silent about all the rest. I act up always to the saying of the poet:

" 'I know the duties of high courtesy,
Your dearest secrets shall be safe with me;
I'll shut them in a little inner room
And seal the lock and throw away the key.' "

Their hearts were much moved towards the porter when they heard his verses and all the rhymes and rhythms he recited; and in jest they said: "You must know that we have spent a great sum of money on this palace. Have you the silver on you to pay us back? For we would not ask you to sit with us unless you paid the reckoning. We take it you desire to stay here to become our companion in the wine and, above all, to keep us waking all the night until the shadow of the dawn fall on our faces." "Love without gold is a poor makeweight in the scales," added the eldest of the girls, the mistress of the house: and the portress said: "If you have nothing, get you gone with nothing!" But here the cateress interrupted, saying: "Let us leave this joke, my sisters. As Allah lives, this boy has not spoiled our day and another might not have been so patient. I myself will undertake to pay for him."

At this the porter rejoiced with all his heart and said to the cateress: "By Allah, I owe this wonderful bargain all to you!" "Stay with us, , then, brave porter," she replied, "and rest assured that you shall be the darling of our eyes." So saying, she rose and, after clasping his waist, began to arrange the flasks, to clarify and pour the wine, and set places for the feast near a pool of water in the centre of the hall. She brought in everything of which they might have need, handed the wine, and saw that all were seated. The porter with these girls on every hand thought that he was dreaming in his sleep.

Soon the cateress took the wine flagon and filled a cup from which each drank three times. Then she filled it afresh and passed it to her sisters and then to the porter, who drank and said these lines:

In this red wine is liveliness
And strength and well-being,
In this red wine is all caress
And every wanton thing;
Drink deep and you will find, I lust
In this red wine lies perfect trust

On this he kissed the hands of the three girls and drained the cup. Then he went up to the mistress of the house, saying: "Mistress, I am your slave, your thing, your chattel!" and he recited, in her honour, this stanza of a certain poet:

I stand most like a slave
Outside your door.
Must I an entrance crave
In vain for ever more?
There is one gift I have—
I stand most like a slave.

Then: "Drink, my friend," said she, "and may the wine be sweet and wholesome in its going down; may it give you strength to set out upon that road where lies all bodily well-being." The porter took the cup, kissed the girl's hand and, in a sweetly modulated voice, sang very low these verses of the poet:

I gave my love a wine
Splendidly red as are her cheeks, I said,
Then she: "I cannot drink these cheeks of mine."
"Ah, let me speak," I said.
"Thou can'st not drink those cheeks of thine;
Then drink these tears and blood of mine!"

Again the young girl took the cup to the porter and, after holding it to his lips, sat down beside her sister. Soon they began to dance and sing and to play with the wonderful petals, the porter all the time taking them in his arms and kissing them, while one said saucy things to him, another drew him to her, and the third beat him with flowers. They went on drinking until the grape sat throned above their reason; and when her reign was fully established, the portress rose and stripped off all her clothes. Jumping into the water of the fountain, she began to play with it, taking it in her mouth and blowing it noisily at the porter, splashing all her body, and letting it run off her in little rivulets. At length, she got out of the fountain and, covering herself in part with her chemise, threw herself down near where the porter sat.

"Now," she smiled at her sisters, "we shall play the game of naming. The porter can be nomenclator." The porter did not understand this word but smiled agreeably. "My darling," she addressed the porter, "do you know the name of that?" The porter praised Allah and answered: "Usually that is called the thing." "Youh, youh! Are you not ashamed at your ignorance?" and taking him by the neck she began to slap him. In desperation, the porter hazarded many guesses. But each was wrong. The portress began to slap him so hard that she abraded the skin. "You tell me its name!" he shouted; and she told him: "Basil of the bridges." "At last," cried the porter. "Praise be to Allah."

After that, they let the cup go round and round; and the second girl, taking off her clothes, jumped into the basin. Then she did as her sister had done and then, getting out, she threw herself near her sister, the portress. She, too, began to catechize the porter. "Light of my life, what is the name of that?" The porter scratched at his head in thought. Then, coming near her, he whispered in her ear. "O listen to his naughty word!" she cried and slapped him so hard that the hall echoed with the sound. She went on slapping him on the neck and pummeling him until he cried out, "Well, what is its name?" And she answered, "Why, as everyone knows, it is a husked sesame."

Now the third girl, in her turn, got up, undressed, and went down into the basin, where she did as her sisters had done. Afterwards she put on her clothes and sat in the lap of the porter. "Guess the name of that," she said, pointing to a nearby object. The porter tried this name and that and ended by asking her to tell him and cease her slapping. "The khan of Abu-Mansur," she replied. Then, in reprisal, the porter rose, undressed and went down into the water. He washed as the girls had done, came out of the basin, and sat between the portress and the cateress. "Now," he said, addressing the mistress of the house, "I shall ask questions. Come, my fairest queen, how excellent are you at this game of names?" All the girls laughed with delight, falling over backwards in their mirth. Each girl made answer in her own fashion. "It," said the portress. "No," said the porter and pinched her by way of forfeit. "That," said the cateress. "No," answered the porter and hugged her roundly. They all made many guesses but the porter answered "no" to each one and hugged and pinched them for punishment. At each new answer he shook his head and kissed and pinched and hugged them until they were roaring with laughter and delight at their foolish game. In the end they had to ask him to tell them. The porter said:

"The name of this is Mighty Mule who feeds on the Basil of bridges, feasts on husked sesame, and stays the night in father Mansur's khan."

At these words, the girls laughed so much that they fell over on their backs; and afterwards all four went on drinking from the same cup until the approach of evening. When night fell, they said to the porter: "Begone now, turn your face and let us see the width of your shoulders." But the porter cried: "By Allah, it is easier for my soul to quit my body than for me to quit your house, my ladies! Let us make the night continue the sweet day and tomorrow all can part and follow their destiny upon the road of Allah." The young cateress then spoke up, saying: "By my life, sisters, let us ask him to pass the night with us; we will have many good laughs at the naughty fellow who is so shameless and yet so gentle." The others agreed, and said to the porter: "Very well, you can stay with us this night on condition that you obey implicitly and ask no reason or explanation of anything you see." "I agree to that, ladies," he said. "Get up, then, and read what is over the door," they commanded; so he rose, and found over the door these words lettered in gold:

"Speak not of what concerns you not or you will hear that which shall please you not."

Reading this, the porter said: "Ladies, I call you to witness that I will never speak of that which concerns me not."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Tenth Night
Had Come

DONIAZADE said, "Finish your tale, dear sister." Shahrazade answering: "Gladly, and as in duty bound," continued:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the porter had made his promise to the girls, the cateress rose and set meat before them all, which they ate with good appetite. After the meal, candles were lighted, perfumed wood and incense burned, and all began to drink again, and eat the various delicacies from the market: especially the porter who also recited well-formed verses all the time, shutting his eyes and shaking his head. Suddenly they heard a knocking on the door, which, though it did not interrupt their pleasure, caused the portress to rise. She came back, saying: ''Indeed, tonight's pleasure is to be perfect, for there are three strangers at the door with shaved beards and each blind of the left eye, which is a strange coincidence. It is easy to see that they come from the lands of Roum, each has different features and yet their faces all match in their fittingness for being laughed at. If we let them in, we can have a lot of fun at their expense.'' She persuaded her companions, who said: ''Tell them that they may come in, but be sure they understand the condition: 'Speak not of what concerns you not or you will hear that which shall please you not.' '' So the young girl ran joyously to the door and came back leading the three one-eyed men, who indeed had shaved beards, moustaches twisted back, and all the signs of that brotherhood of beggars called kalendars. As soon as they came in, they wished peace to the company, backing one by one as they did so; on which the girls stood up and invited them to be seated. The three men, after they had sat down, looked at the porter, who was very drunk, and supposing him to belong to their brotherhood, said among themselves: ''Here is another kalendar like us; he is sure to bear us friendly company.'' But the porter who had heard what they said jumped to his feet and, eyeing them sternly and a little squintingly, said: ‘‘All right, all right, my friends, make yourselves at home; and start in by digesting those words written above the door.’’ The girls burst out laughing at his words and said to each other: ‘‘We are going to have fun with these kalendars and the porter.’’ They set food before the kalendars—who ate like kalendars!—then wine—and the kalendars drank turn and turn about, reaching out again and again for the cup. When the drink was passing about at a rare pace, the porter said: ‘‘Come, brothers, have you not some good tale of marvellous adventure in your scrips to amuse us?’’ Cheered by this suggestion, the kalendars asked for musical instruments and, when the portress had fetched out a Mosul drum fitted with crotals, a lute of Irak, and a Persian flagiolet, they stood up and began to play while the girls sang with them. The porter became frenzied with pleasure and kept on shouting: ‘‘Ha! ya Allah!’’ so struck was he by the harmonious voices of the singers.

In the middle of all this, knocking was again heard upon the door and the portress rose to see who was there.

Now this was the reason of the knocking on the door:

That night the khalifat, Haroun Al-Rachid, had gone down to wander about his city to see and hear for himself what might be going on there. He was accompanied by his wazir, Giafar Al-Barmaki, and by Massrur, his swordbearer, the instrument of his justice. You must know that it was a habit of his to disguise himself as a merchant and make such expeditions.

While he was walking through the streets of the city, he passed that palace and heard the sounds of music and gaiety which issued from it. Then said the khalifat to Giafar: "I wish to enter that place to see those singers." Giafar answered: "They must be a crowd of drunkards. If we go in some hurt may come to you." But the khalifat said: "Certainly we must go in. I wish to find a way by which we can enter and take them by surprise." "I hear and I obey," said Giafar at this command, and, going up to the door, he knocked.

When the young portress opened the door, the wazir said to her: "My mistress, we are merchants from Tiberias. Ten days ago we came to Baghdad with our goods and took lodging in the khan of the merchants. One of the other traders at the khan asked us to his house tonight to eat with him. After the meal, which lasted an hour in which we ate and drank well, he gave us leave to depart. We came out but, the night being dark and we strangers, lost our way to the khan where we lodge. So now we beg you of your great goodness to let us come in and pass the night at your house. Allah will reward your kindness." The portress looked at them closely, and seeing that they had the appearance of most respectable merchants, went in to ask the advice of her two companions. The other two said: "Let them come in!" So she returned to the door, crying: "Enter!" On this invitation the khalifat and Giafar and Massrur came in and the girls rose, putting themselves at their service and saying: "Be very welcome. Take your ease here, dear companions; but accept, we pray, this one condition: 'Speak not of what concerns you not or you will hear that which shall please you not.'" The newcomers answered: "Be it so," and sat down with the others. While they were being invited to drink and to send round the cup the khalifat looked at the three kalendars and was astonished to see that each was blind of the left eye; then at the girls and was overcome with surprise at all their beauty and grace. When the girls, in their ministrations to the guests, offered the khalifat a cup of the rarest wine, he refused, saying: "I am vowed to pilgrimage." So the portress got up and placed a little table of finest inlay before him on which she set a cup of Chinese porcelain into which she poured spring water refreshed with snow, mingling sugar and rose-water within it. The khalifat acepted this, thanking her cordially and saying to himself: "Tomorrow I shall reward her for her kindness."

The girls continued to act the hostess and pass about the wine till the wits of the companions were dancing dizzily. Then she who was the mistress of the house rose up and, having asked if any wanted more, took the cateress by the hand saying: "Rise up, my sister, that we may do that which we have to do." "Be it as you say," the other answered. On this the portress also rose and, telling the kalendars to get up from the centre of the hall and seat themselves by the door, herself cleared and tidied the central space. The other two called to the porter: "By Allah, your friendship is of but little use! You are no stranger here but belong to the house." On this the porter stood up, lifted the skirts of his robe, and tightened his belt, saying: "Tell me what to do and I shall do it." "Follow me," said the portress. So he followed her out of the hall and saw two black bitches with chains round their necks, which, as he was bid, he led back into the middle of the hall. Then the eldest pulled up her sleeves, took a whip, and told the porter to lead forward one of the bitches. When he had done so, dragging her by the chain, the animal began to weep raising its head piteously towards the girl; but the latter, without seeming to notice, fell upon it, beating it over the head with her whip till the bitch yelled and wept and she herself could strike no more. Then she threw down the whip and, taking the bitch in her arms, clasped it to her breast, wiped away its tears, and kissed its head which she held between her hands. After a little, she said to the porter: "Bring me the other, and take this one back." So the porter brought the other bitch forward and the girl treated it as she had the first.

The khalifat felt his heart filled with pity at this sight; his breast shook with grief and he signed with his eye to Giafar to question the young woman. But Giafar signed to him that it was better to keep silent. Soon the mistress of the house, turned to her sisters saying: "Come let us do as is our custom." They answered: "Yes"; so she got up on to the marble bed which was plated with gold and silver and said to the other two: "Let it be done!" Then the portress also got up on to the bed; but the cateress went into her own room and brought back a satin bag fringed with green silk. Halting before the other two, she opened the bag and drew a lute from it. First tuning this and then playing upon it, she sang these lines of love and all the sadness of love:

"Love at my door
Knocked and I gave him bed.
When sleep saw this
He took offence and fled.
Give me back sleep;
Where has he gone?" I said.

They said: "Our friend
That kept the sure straight way,

Who has done this
To send you so astray,
To lead you blind
Into the sand?" said they.

I said: "Not I,
But she must answer make.
I could but cry:
My blood, which is hers to take,
Lies heavily
Not spilled yet for her sake.

I chose a girl
To put my thought in her;
She is my thought,
My thought's her imager;
Now she is gone
Fire is my comforter.

See for yourselves!
Even Allah like a lover
From molten threads
Of the syrup of life wove her;
Then made all gems
And fruits with what was over."

But they said: "Fool,
Small joy and, for the rest,
Torture and tears
And hugging to the breast
Shades on a pool.
The first drink is the best."

"If I am drunk
I came not so by drinking,

It was enough
To see the ruby winking
There in the glass—
Sleep saw it too, I'm thinking.

It's not that time
Has passed, but that so has she,
It's not that love
Won't last, but that nor will she,
Not that life's gone,
But that she's gone from me.

My soul is bound
By the scents of her body,
Jasmin and musk
And rose of her body,
Amber and nard,
The scents of her body.''

''Allah comfort you, my sister,'' cried out the portress, when the song was finished; and, tearing all her clothes in an ecstasy of grief, she fell in a faint upon the floor.

Her body being in some sort bared, the khalifat was able to see upon it the prints of whips and rods, a circumstance which astonished and appalled him. But the cateress came and cast water in her sister's face until she recovered consciousness; then she brought her a new robe and helped her into it.

The khalifat whispered to Giafar: ''You do not seem moved by this. Do you not see the marks of the scourge on the woman? I can hardly keep silent and I will know no rest until I have found out the truth of all this and of the matter of the two bitches.'' ''Lord and master,'' answered Giafar, ''remember the condition: 'Speak not of what concerns you not or you will hear that which shall please you not.' "

While they were speaking thus, the cateress again took up the lute and, pressing it against her rounded breast, sounded the chords and sang:

If one came to us plaining of love,
What would we answer?
Seeing that we also are drowned in love,
What would we do?
If we charged a speaker to speak for us,
What would he know of it?

He has brought us within two fingers of the pit of death.
He has cut our heart-strings that they might hold him no more.
Has he kept one withered seed of all our love?
Does he think at all that we are stricken and with what disease?
All that he has forgotten we shall call upon God to remember.

If one came to us plaining of love,
What would we answer?
Seeing that we also are drowned in love,
What would we do?
If we charged a speaker to speak for us,
What would he know of it?

Again the portress wept at this sad song and tore her robe and fell back fainting; and again the cateress cast water in her face, raised her up and put another robe on her; while the eldest of them said to her: "Courage, courage, for the final song. It is our duty." So the cateress tuned the lute afresh and sang:

Cease this parting as of years,
I have no more tears.

Your absence is no longer needed,
It has succeeded.

Men have the months and years alway,
Women but a day.

How shall I call a murder on
You, when the body's nearly gone
That showed what you had done?

How cry a debt when the wet
White cheek hardly remaineth yet,
Where was written the debt?

My sighs fan up your flame.
That would be well if the game
You hunted were still the same.

Mussulmans, make a feud,
Cover him with the rude
Hates of a multitude.

Yet do not—for all that he
Felt of your cruelty
Would be felt by me.

Rather crush me beneath your feet,
And he'll not feel his pulses beat
At the other side of the street.

Again the portress fell fainting and again her naked body showed the marks of whips and rods.

The three kalendars began whispering together when they saw this: "It had been better for us if we had never come into this house, even though we had to sleep on the naked ground; for what we have just seen is enough to melt the marrow in our spines." The khalifat turned to them and said: "Why is that?" "We are afraid of what has happened," they answered. "Is that so?" said the khalifat, "then you are not of this house?" "We are not," they answered, "we imagined it belonged to that man beside you." "By Allah, it does not!" cried the porter. "This is the very first time that I have entered here. Also, God knows, it would have been better for me to have slept on the rubbish heaps among the ruins."

So they concerted with each other and said: "We are seven men to three women, let us demand an explanation of these things and, if they will not answer willingly, we can use force." They all agreed with this except Giafar, who said: "Do you think that right and equitable? Remember, we are their guests and that they laid down certain conditions which we swore to follow. Tonight is nearly over; it would be better for each of us to go forth and seek his destiny upon the road of Allah"; then, winking at the khalifat and drawing him aside, he continued: "We have but one more hour to stay here. Tomorrow I promise that I will bring them up before you and then we can compel them to tell their story." But the khalifat said: "I have not the patience to wait till tomorrow." The others continued their planning, some saying this and some saying that, but it all came back to the question: "Who is to ask them?" At last it was decided that the porter should do so.

So when the girls said: "Good folk, what are you talking about?" the porter rose to his feet and, standing up straight before the lady of the house, addressed her courteously: "My queen, I ask and pray you in the name of Allah, on behalf of all us jolly fellows, to tell us the tale of those two bitches and why you so beat them and then weep over them and kiss them. Tell us, too, for we wait to hear it, the cause of the marks of whips and rods on the body of your sister. This we ask of you; that is all, my queen." Then the lady of the house questioned them: "Is this that the porter has said asked in the name of all?" And each, with the exception of Giafar, answered: "Yes." Giafar said nothing.

The eldest girl, hearing this answer of theirs, exclaimed: "As Allah lives, you, who are our guests, have done us here the most grievous of wrongs. We bound you to this condition: 'Speak not of what concerns you not or you will hear that which shall please you not.' Was it not enough for you to come into our house and eat our good food? Perhaps, though, it was less your fault than the fault of our sister who let you in."

So saying, she pulled the sleeves of her robe away from her wrist and beat the floor with her foot three times, calling: "Come quick, come quick!" The door of one of the great curtained presses opened and out glided seven strong negroes carrying sharpened swords. To these she said: "Bind the arms of these prattling guests and fasten them one to the other." This the negroes did, saying: "O mistress, O hidden flower beyond the sight of men, may we cut off their heads?" "Have patience for an hour," she answered, "I wish to know what sort of men they are before they die."

On this the porter cried: "By Allah, mistress queen, do not kill me for the crime of others. All these have sinned, committing a notable crime against you, but not I. As God lives, how happy, how paradisal would our night have been if we had never set eyes on these ill-omened kalendars! I have always said that kalendars could lay waste the loveliest of cities just by coming into it." And he added these lines:

The fairest gift of strength is clemency
If the weak offend;
So do not, for our love's sake, punish me
For the fault of a friend.

The eldest girl burst out laughing when the porter had finished speaking.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of day and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eleventh Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the eldest girl burst out laughing after having been angry, she came down to the company and said: "Tell me all that there is to tell, for you have but one hour to live. I give you this indulgence because you are poor folk. If you were among the most noble, great ones of your tribes or even governors, it is true that I would hurry on your punishment."

"Giafar, we are in sorry case," said the khalifat, "tell her who we are or she may kill us." "Which is exactly what we deserve," said Giafar. Then said the khalifat: "There is a time for being witty and a time for being serious, there is a time for everything."

Now first of all the eldest girl approached the kalendars, and asked them: "Are you brothers?" To this they answered: "No, by Allah, we are only poor men of the poorest who live by cupping and scarifying." Then she turned to one of them and said: "Were you born without one eye?" "As God lives, I was not," he said, "but the tale of the way I lost my eye is so extraordinary that, if it were written with a needle in the corner of another eye, yet would it be a lesson to the circumspect." The second and the third made the same kind of answer; then all three said: "Each of us was born in a different country; the stories of our lives are strange and our adventures pass the marvellous." "Well then," said the girl, "each of you must tell his story and the reason of his coming to our house. Should the tale seem good to us, each may make his bow and go his way."

The first who came forward was the porter; and he said: "My queen, I am a porter, nothing more. Your cateress here gave me things to carry and led me to you. You know well what happened to me after I got here and, if I refuse to be more particular, you know why. That is all my tale. I will not add another word to it, and Allah bless you." Then said the eldest girl: "Get you gone, make your bow, and let us see the last of you." "But," said the porter, "No, my God, I will not stir until I have heard the tales of these friends of mine."

Then the first kalendar came forward to tell his tale, and said:

TALE OF THE FIRST KALENDAR

Mistress, I am going to tell you the things which led up to the shaving of my beard and the loss of my eye.

Know that my father was a king and that he had a brother who was king over another city. Also it was fated that, on the day of my birth, a son was born to my uncle.

Years passed, and my cousin and I grew to manhood. I must tell you that it was my custom from time to time to visit my uncle and stay some months with him. The last time I visited him, my cousin gave me great and generous welcome, killed the finest sheep for me, clarified the rarest wines in my honour. When we had drunken and the wine had somewhat got the better of us, my cousin said to me: "Dear friend and best loved cousin, I have a favour to ask of you which I beg you not to refuse." "I grant it with all my heart," I answered, and also, at his request, swore on our sacred religion that I would do as he bid me. Thereon he went away, and came back in a few minutes with a sumptuously dressed, delicately perfumed lady, accoutred in everything with great expense. Pointing her out to me, he begged me to take her and to precede him to a certain tomb lying in the middle of many others whose exact situation he pointed out to me. As I could not refuse, because of my oath, I led the lady with me to the tomb, under the dome of which we entered and sat down to wait for my cousin. Soon he joined us, bringing with him a vessel of water, a sack containing plaster, and a little axe. With this axe he lifted the stones of the slab of the tomb one by one and dug in the earth beneath till he exposed a cover about the size of a small door. This he opened and below it I saw a vaulted stairway. Turning to the woman my cousin said: "It is for you to choose," and without a word, the lady went down the stairs and disappeared. Then said my cousin to me: "Cousin, this is what you must do to complete your vow: when I have gone, put back the cover and the earth, mix the plaster, and so plaster down the stones that none can say: 'Someone has been opening this old tomb.' It is quite possible, for I have been working here a year and only Allah knows it." Then adding: "My only grief is that I am going away from you, dear cousin," he went down the stairs and was lost in the depths of the tomb. When he had gone from my sight, I fastened down the cover and worked at the tomb till it appeared untouched.

Returning to my uncle's palace, I found that he was away hunting, so I lay down and slept all night. But when morning came I thought over all that my cousin and I had done and repented bitterly but uselessly. I went back to the tombs and searched all day till nightfall without being able to find the one I sought; and, when I returned to the palace, I could neither eat nor drink for thinking of my cousin. I lay all night in pain and at daybreak returned to the burial ground, grieving that I had hearkened to my cousin and searching in vain among all the tombs. Having hunted for seven days without finding the one into which he had gone down, I grew almost mad and, both to rest my mind and to distract my grief, set out on the return journey to my father's country.

No sooner had I come to the gates of this city than a rabble rushed out at me and bound my arms to my sides. I was utterly astonished, seeing I was the prince of that city, and that among these men were servants of my father and my own young slaves. "Alas, alas, what has happened to my father?" I said to myself, and then began to question those who had bound me without receiving any reply. But finally, one of my young slaves who was among them, said to me: "Fate has gone up against your father, his soldiers have mutinied against him, and the wazir has killed him; and we were set here in ambush to wait your coming."

They took me up, more dead than alive with grief at the death of my father, and brought me into the presence of the wazir who had killed him. Now there was an ancient enmity between me and this wazir, which had come about through my passion for shooting with the arbalist. For one day, while I was on the terrace of our palace, a great bird lit on the terrace of the wazir's palace, where the wazir happened to be walking. I fired and, missing the bird, hit the wazir in the eye and put it out, as had been ordained by Allah. As it is written:

God writes for eternity, this is not given to men;
But even He cannot re-write it again,
And we walk in the wake of His pen.

We have followed the tracing of the letters of God, my friend,
The outline was not ours to mar or to mend;
Sit quiet and wait for the end.

When I knocked out the wazir's eye, he dared not say anything because my father was the king of the city; but now, when I stood before him with arms bound to my sides, he ordered my head to be cut off. "For what crime?" I asked. And: "What crime is greater than this?" he answered, pointing to his eye-socket. "I did it by accident," I said. "Yes," he answered, "you did it by accident, and I will do it on purpose." Then, ordering me to be brought within his reach, he put forward his finger and pulled out my left eye.

Since then I have been one-eyed, as you all see.

Not content with this, the wazir had me bound completely and put in a chest, which he delivered to his sword-bearer, saying: "This is your affair. Draw your sword, take him out beyond the city, kill him, and leave him as food for the wild beasts.''

So the sword-bearer carried me outside the city, lifted me out of the chest and was about to bind my eyes, when I began to weep and intone these lines:

When you wept apart,
In the days of my power I regarded your tears;
I thought you a steel shield proof against spears,
And you are the lance-head pressed against my heart.

You had proved your aim,
The great bowman I had looked for to confound my foes;
I knew yours from the arrows of all bows;
True-flying to my heart I see the same.

When the sword-bearer heard these lines, he remembered that he had been my father's sworder also and that I had been very good to him; so he exclaimed: ''How can I kill you, I who am your slave?'' Then he said to me: ''Fly, for I spare your life; but never return to this land or you will die and be the cause of my death also. The poet has said:

Go, my friend, you shall not die;
Leave the houses:
There are other lands to try
Full of free carouses.

Is it not a silly thing
To be put on,
When the whole world breaks in Spring
For you to set your foot on?

Somewhere, somehow, you will pass,
That is certain.
But when you'll see the under-grass
Lies still behind the curtain.

The lion grows each yellow thew
Near Samarkand;
Remember that his soul grows too
In the freedom of the sand."

I kissed his hands, when he had said these lines; and could hardly believe that I was safe until I had fled a long way.

As I went, I consoled myself for the loss of my eye by thinking on my deliverance from death, and so proceeded until I reached my uncle's city again. When I found my uncle and told him of the fate of my father and how I had lost my eye, he wept bitterly, crying: "Nephew, nephew, you add another grief to all my griefs, another sorrow to my sorrows. My own boy has been missing for many days and none can tell me what has happened to him." He swooned and, coming out of his swoon, continued: "My child, I was grieving bitterly for my son: now I must grieve for you and your father. But remember, my boy, it is better to have lost an eye than to have lost life itself."

At this, I could no longer keep silent as to what had happened to my cousin; so I told my uncle the whole truth and he rejoiced exceedingly at my story. "Take me quickly to the tomb!" he cried, and I was forced to admit I could not find it.

Nevertheless, we went together to the burial ground and this time, after a long search, I recognised the tomb. We both rejoiced and, after entering the dome and displacing the stones, the earth, and the cover, made our way down fifty steps of the staircase. At the bottom we were met by a great smoke which blinded us, but my uncle said that word which takes away all fear: "There is no might and dominion save in Allah, Almighty, Most High!"

We journeyed through the smoke and came to a great hall, filled with flour and every kind of grain and provisions of all sorts. In the middle of the hall we saw a curtain draped above a bed; and, when we looked into the interior of the bed, my uncle recognised his son who was lying there in the arms of the woman who had gone down with him. But they were both nothing but black cinders, just as if they had been thrown into a pit of fire.

My uncle, seeing this, spat in his son's face, crying: "This is your reward, O wicked youth; the punishment of this world. There yet remains the punishment of another world, more terrible and lasting longer." So saying, my uncle took off his slipper and struck his dead son's face with the heel of it.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of day and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Twelfth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that, while the khalifat and Giafar, and all that were there listened intently the kalendar continued his tale to the girl who was the mistress of the house.

When my uncle slippered his son's face, I was sore astonished and wept for my cousin and the girl lying there in the likeness of charcoal. So I cried: "Uncle, as Allah lives, restrain yourself! I am in the throes of grief at what has happened to your son; yes, for both him and her, lying there like charcoal. But most at seeing you, his father, beating his dead face with a slipper." Then my uncle told me the following facts:

Nephew, you must know that this child of mine was inflamed with love for his own sister. I kept him away from her and used to console myself with the thought that they were so young. But nothing of the sort! Hardly had they become pubic when they did evil together and I found them out. I was scarcely able to believe my eyes, and scolded him with a terrible scolding, saying: "Beware of these filthy actions which none ever did before and none will ever do after. Otherwise we shall become shamed and despicable among kings. Riders will carry the tale about the earth. Take care then that you do not do this again, or I will first curse you and then slay you!" Afterwards I kept them sedulously apart, but the wretched girl also loved him with an inordinate love and Satan completed his work within them.

When my son saw that he was kept away from his sister, he secretly prepared this chamber underground, filled it with food and, taking advantage of my absence at the hunt, came down here with her.

Then the wrath of the Highest kindled against them; and the fire of the Highest burned them both together. But their punishment in the next world will be more terrible and lasting.

Then my uncle wept and I wept and he said to me: "Henceforward you shall be my son in the place of this one."

When I had sat there for an hour considering the sorry ways of the world, my father's death and usurped throne, the loss of my eye which you all have seen, and that strange end which had come to my cousin, I wept again from the bottom of my heart.

Eventually we came up out of the tomb, heaped earth upon it and, leaving it exactly as it had been before, made our way home.

But, hardly had we gone in and seated ourselves, when we became aware of sounds of war, drums and trumpets, and the galloping of soldiers in the streets. The city became full of noise and shouting and dust raised by the horses' hoofs. We were at a loss to understand what these things might mean until the king, my uncle, asked an attendant who said: "The wazir, who has killed your brother, has massed all his troops of soldiers and come against us by forced marches to take the city by assault. But the people, seeing that they were not in a state to resist him, have opened the gates and given him the city."

I was thrown into great despondency at these words, coming as they did on top of all the trials and sufferings which had visited us. I did not know what to do, considering that, if I showed myself, the people of the city as well as the soldiers who had been my father's would recognise me and kill me out of hand. So, not being able to think of any other expedient, I shaved my beard, put on these rags and left the city. By tedious stages I reached Baghdad, hoping to find safety and also someone who would admit me into the presence of the Prince of Believers, Haroun Al-Rachid, the khalifat of God, that I might tell him my story and all my sorrows.

It was only tonight that I arrived in the city and I did not know my way about it. By chance, I met this other kalendar and, while we were talking together, we were joined by our third companion, also a kalendar. Recognising each other as strangers, we wended our way in the darkness together till the kind hand of Destiny led us to your house, my mistress.

That is the story of my shaved beard and my lost eye.

When she had heard the tale of the first kalendar, the mistress of the house said to him: "That is well; make you bow and depart with all speed."

The first kalendar answered: "Indeed, mistress, I shall not stir from here until I have heard the tales of all the other companions."

So, while all were marvelling at the story and the khalifat was even whispering to Giafar: "Never in all my life have I heard a like adventure," the first kalendar sat down cross-legged on the floor and the second kalendar advancing kissed the earth between the hands of the young mistress of the house and told:

THE TALE OF THE SECOND KALENDAR

INDEED, mistress, neither was I born with one eye; and the story which I am going to tell you is so marvellous that, if it were written with a needle on the inner corner of an eye, yet would it serve as a lesson to the circumspect.

Though you see me thus, I am a king, and the son of a king, a man of education beyond the ordinary. I have read the Koran with all its seven narratives; I have read all essential books and the writings of the masters of science; I have studied the lore of the stars and the star-like lore of the poets. So rapidly did I learn that I surpassed in knowledge all the men of my time.

Especially did my fame spread abroad as a caligrapher; I became renowned in all countries and my worth was known among kings. So it happened that the king of Hind heard tell of me and sent begging my father to let me visit him. This invitation he accompanied with sumptuous gifts and presents meet for kings; so my father consented and fitted out six ships for me with all manner of luxuries and I departed.

After a month's voyage, we came to land and, unshipping the horses and camels we had with us, loaded them with presents for the king of Hind and set out on our journey. But hardly had we started, when a great dust storm rose, filling all the sky and the earth with sand for the space of an hour. When it died down, we found close upon us a troop of sixty armed men, raging like lions, desert Arabs, cut-purses of the highway. We turned and fled but when they saw our ten camels loaded with gifts for the King of Hind, they pursued us at a gallop. So we signed to them with our finger that we were envoys to the mighty king and should not be molested. But they answered: "We know nothing of kings," and forthwith killed some of my slaves. The rest of us took to flight in all directions, I carrying with me a great and terrible wound, while the Arabs contented themselves with pillaging our rich belongings.

I fled and fled, despairing bitterly at my change of fortune, till I came to the top of a mountain, where I found a cave in which I passed the night.

Next morning I left it and journeyed on until I came to a great and beautiful city, whose air was of such potent balm that winter might not lay hand upon her but the spring covered her with his roses all the year. I wept with joy when I reached this city, being fatigued and broken by my journey, worn and pale from my wound and utterly changed from my former state.

I was wandering ignorantly about the streets, when I passed a tailor sewing in his shop whom I greeted and who greeted me. He cordially invited me to seat myself, embraced me, and asked me generous questions about my wanderings. I told him all that had befallen me from beginning to end and he was very moved at my recital, saying to me: "My sweet young man, you must on no account tell this story to any other person here; for the king of this city is a deadly enemy of your father, having an old grudge against him; and I fear for your safety."

He gave me food and drink and we ate and drank together. After a long conversation, he brought out a mattress and a quilt for me and let me sleep that night in a corner of his shop. I stayed with him for three days and at the end of that time he asked if I knew any trade by which I could earn a livelihood. "Certainly I do," I answered, "I am deeply read in the law, I am a past-master in all sciences; literature and computation are thoroughly well known to me." "My friend," he answered, "all that is not a trade, or rather, if you wish, it is a trade" (for he saw that I was annoyed), "but it is not of very much account in the markets of our city. No one here knows anything of study or of writing or of reading, they simply know how to make money." I could only answer that I knew nothing besides these things. Said he: "Come, my son, pull yourself together, take an axe and a cord, go out and cut wood in the countryside till Allah shows you a better occupation. Above all, tell your story to no one or they will kill you." With this, the good man bought me an axe and a rope and sent me out in charge of a gang of woodcutters, under whose special care he placed me.

I went out with the woodcutters and when I had chopped sufficient faggots, loaded them on my head and sold them in the streets of the city for half a dinar. With a little of this money I bought food and the rest I carefully put aside. I laboured in this way for a full year, visiting my friend the tailor in his shop every day and resting there in my corner without having to pay him anything.

One day, straying away from the others, I came to a thickly wooded glade where there were many faggots to be had. I chose a dead tree and was beginning to loosen the earth about her roots when the head of my axe was caught in a copper ring. I removed the earth all about this ring and, coming to a wooden cover in which it was fastened, lifted it and found an underground staircase. In my curiosity, I went down the stairs to the bottom and, opening a door, entered the mighty hall of a most marvellous palace. In this hall there was a young girl more beautiful than all the pearls of history; I had endured much and yet at the sight of her all my troubles were left behind and I knelt down in adoration before Allah, who had moulded so perfect a beauty out of the centuries.

She looked at me and said: "Are you a man or a Jinni?" "A man," I answered, and she said: "Who then has led you to this place, where for full twenty years, I have not seen a human face?" I found her words and herself so sweet that I answered: "Lady, it was Allah who led me to your home that all my troubles and my sorrows might be forgotten." I told her my story from beginning to end; she wept for me and told me her story likewise.

"I am the daughter of King Aknamus, last King of Hind and master of the Isle of Ebony. I was to be married to my cousin, but on my wedding night, even before the marriage was consummated, the Ifrit Jarjaris, son of Rajmus, son of the Foul Fiend himself, carried me off and put me in this place which he had provisioned with all I could desire of sweet things and of jams, of robes and precious stuffs, of furniture and meat and drink. Since then he has come to see me every ten days and stays one night with me, going away in the morning. Also he has told me that if I have need of him during the ten days that he is away, I have nothing to do, night or day, but touch with my hands two lines which are written under the cupola of that little room. If I but touch them, he will appear at once. It is four days since he has been here, so that there will be six more before he will come again. Therefore you can stay with me for five days and go away the day before he comes."

"Most certainly I can," I answered, and she was filled with joy. She got up from where she was lying and, taking me by the hand, led me through many arched apartments to a warm agreeable bath in which all the air was scented. Here I quickly undressed myself and bathed luxuriously. After my bath, we sat side by side on the hammam couch and she regaled me with musk-sweetened sherbet and delicious cakes. We talked for a long time and ate unsparingly of the provisions of the Ifrit, who had ravished her away.

At last she said: "For this evening you had better sleep and rest after all your toil; you will be more ready for me then."

I was indeed weary so I thanked her and lay down to sleep, forgetting all my cares. When I woke I found her by my side, pleasantly massaging my limbs and my feet. So I called down all the blessings of Allah upon her and we sat together for an hour, saying sweet things to each other. "As God lives," she said at last, "before you came I was all alone in this underground palace, with no one to speak to for twenty years, with no companion save sorrow and a bosom filled with sobs, but now, glory be to Allah that He has brought you to me!"

Then in a sweet voice she sang this song:

For your feet,
If we had known of your coming,
We would have been weaving
Our heart's blood,
The velvet of our eyes
To a red and black carpet.

For your couch
If we had known of your coming,
We would have been spreading
Our cool cheeks.
And given the fervor of our sighs
Dear stranger in the night.

Hand on heart I thanked her for her song; my love for her increased in me and all my sorrows fell away. We drank together from the same cup till nightfall and all night I lay with her in a heaven of bliss. Never was such a night; and when morning came, we rose, in love with each other and with happiness.

I was still all passion and, thinking to prolong my rapture, I said: "Shall I not take you from this underground place and free you from the Jinni?" "Be quiet," she answered, laughing, "and be content with what you have. The poor Ifrit has only one night in ten and I promise you all the other nine.'' But I, lifted by passion and by wine, spoke thus extravagantly: ''Not so! I am going to destroy that alcove with its magic inscription and then the Ifrit will come and I shall kill him. For a long time, it has been my custom to amuse myself by killing Ifrits.''

To calm my frenzy she recited these lines:

You, who would bind love,
Thinking to make us
Yours by the binding,
Soon shall discover
Ever a lover
Finishes finding
Love will forsake us,
The bound and unkind love;
But if you unbind love
He'll wrap us and take us
In nets of his winding
And never be over.

But paying no attention to the lines, I gave a violent kick with my foot at the wall of the alcove.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Thirteenth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the second kalendar continued telling his story to the young mistress of the house in these words:

Mistress, when I kicked down the alcove the woman cried: "The Ifrit is upon us! Did I not warn you? As Allah lives, you have destroyed me! Flee by the way you came and save yourself!"

I rushed to the staircase, forgetting my sandals and my axe in the hurry of my terror. When I had climbed a few steps, I remembered them and went back to look for them; but the earth opened and an Ifrit of terrible size and ugliness sprang from it, crying to the woman; "What does all this violence mean? It frightened me. What harm has befallen you?" "No harm," she answered, "save that, just now, I felt my heart heavy with solitude and, rising to get some drink to lighten it, I fell against the alcove." But the Ifrit, who had looked about the hall and seen my sandals and my axe, cried: "Oh, and what are these things, you lying whore? Tell me, what man do they belong to?" "I never saw them before you showed them to me," she answered, "probably they were hanging to the back of your clothes and you brought them here yourself." "Weak, tortuous and foolish words!" exclaimed the furious Jinni. "They will not take me in, you wanton."

On this, he stripped her naked, crucified her between four pegs fastened in the earth, and, putting her to the torture, began to question her. I could not bear to see this or to hear her sobs, so ran trembling up the stairs and, reaching the outer air, put back the cover and removed all traces of the entrance. I repented bitterly of the foolish thing I had done, thinking of the girl's beauty and of all the torture which the villain who had kept her there for twenty years had inflicted on her for my sake. From this I fell to lamenting my father, my own lost kingdom, and the miserable descent I had made to be a woodcutter.

So I wept, and recited a suitable verse. Making my way to the city, I found my friend the tailor had been, as the saying is, on coals of fire at my absence. In his anxiety, he called to me: "When you did not come yesterday, my heart lay awake all night because of you. I feared that a savage beast or other mischance had destroyed you in the forest. Praise be to Allah that you are safe!" Thanking him and sitting down in my accustomed corner, I began to brood on what had happened and to curse myself for the unlucky kick that I had given the alcove. All of a sudden my good friend the tailor came in, saying: "There is a man at the shop door, a Persian, who has your axe and your sandals and is asking for you. He has been going round all the woodcutters in the street saying that he found them in the road when he went out to pray at dawn at the call of the Muezzin. Some of the woodcutters recognised them and directed the Persian to come here. He is outside the door; so go and thank him for his trouble, and take your sandals and your axe again." I paled and nearly fainted at his words and, while I stayed prostrate where I was, the ground in front of my corner opened and the Persian leapt from it, showing himself to be the Ifrit.

You must know that he had put the young woman to terrible tortures without getting her to admit anything; and so, taking up my axe and sandals, had said: "I will show you that I am indeed Jarjaris of the true seed of the Evil One. You shall see whether or no I can find the owner of these things." And, as I have told you, he tracked me among the woodcutters by a trick.

Swiftly he came to me, swiftly lifted me, and flew with me high into the air. When I had lost consciousness, he plunged with me down through the earth to the palace where I had tasted so much lustful bliss. When I saw the girl, naked and with blood flowing from her flanks, I wept bitterly. But the Ifrit, going to her and seizing her arm, said: "Here is your lover, you licentious bitch." The girl looked me straight in the face, saying: "I do not know him; I have never seen him before." "What," shrieked the Ifrit, "here is the very body that you sinned with and you deny it!" But she continued saying: "I do not know him. I have never seen him in my life, nor would it be right for me to lie in the face of God." "If that is so," said the Ifrit, "take this sword and cut off his head." She took the sword and stopped before me. Yellow with fear and weeping copiously, I signed to her with my eyebrows to spare me. She winked at me, saying at the same time in a loud voice: "You are the cause of all our troubles." I signed to her again with my eyebrows, at the same time reciting these ordinary lines, whose inner significance the Ifrit could not understand:

I could not say I had a secret for your ears;
But my eyes said so.
I could not say that you had caused my tears;
But my eyes said so.
I could not say my fingers mean I love you,
I could not say my brows are meant to move you,
I could not say my heart is here to prove you;
But my eyes said so.

The poor girl understood my signs and my verses and threw the sword at the feet of the Ifrit, who picked it up and handed it to me. "Cut off her head," he said, "and you shall depart free and unharmed. "Certainly," I answered grasping the sword, stepping forward and raising my arm; but she said with her brows: "Did I betray you?" So I wept and threw away the sword, saying to the Ifrit: "Great Jinni, robust unconquerable hero, if she, who being a woman has neither faith nor reason, found it unlawful to cut off my head and threw away the sword; how can I, who am a man, find it lawful to cut off her head, especially as I have never seen her before? Even if you make me drink the bitterest cup of death, I shall not do so." "Ah, now I know that there is love between you," said the Ifrit.

Then, mistress, that devil cut off both the hands and both the feet of that poor girl with four strokes of the sword; so that I thought I should die of grief at the sight.

But even so she looked at me sideways and winked at me and, alas, the Ifrit saw the wink. "O harlot's daughter," he cried, "would you commit adultery with your eyes?" So saying, he cut off her head with the sword and, turning to me, addressed me in these words: "Learn, O human, that among us Jinni it is allowed, and even praiseworthy, to kill an adulteress. I bore away this girl on her wedding night, when she was but twelve years old and still unknown to man. I brought her here and visited her every tenth day, disguising myself in the form of a Persian. Finding her unfailthful I have killed her. For she was unfaithful, even if it was only with her eye. As for you, since I am not sure that you have made love to her, I will not kill you. But, so that you shall not laugh at me behind my back, I shall inflict some evil upon you to bring down your pride. Now choose what evil you would prefer."

Naturally, good lady, I rejoiced to the utmost when I saw that I should escape with my life; and this encouraged me to take advantage of the Ifrit's clemency. So I said: "I find it very hard to choose one out of all the evils that there are. I think I would prefer none."

The Ifrit stamped in vexation and said: "I told you to choose; choose quickly then into what form I shall change you. What, an ass, a dog, a mule, a crow, or an ape?" I answered still facetiously, hoping for pardon: "As Allah lives, master Jarjaris of the great tribe of the Evil One, if you spare me, Allah will spare you. Well He knows how to reward one who pardons a good Moslem who has done no harm." I went on praying and humbling myself in vain until he cut me short saying: "No more words, or I shall kill you. Do not try to take advantage of my goodness for I am fully determined to bewitch you in some form."

Straightway he caught me up, broke all the palace and the earth about us, and flew so high with me up into the air that the earth appeared below me in the likeness of a little dish of water. At last he set me down on the top of a high mountain and taking a handful of earth mumbled some words over it, muttering: "Hum, hum, hum," and threw it over me, crying: "Come out of that shape and be an ape!" On the instant I became an ape, at least a hundred years old and as foul-faced as hell itself. Seeing myself in this form, I jumped about in grief and found myself capable of prodigious leaps. But these did me no good so I sat down and wept, whereat the Ifrit laughed in a terrible fashion and disappeared.

After I had remained there for some time, thinking on the injustice of fate and how it regards not any man, I leapt and gambolled from the top of the mountain to its base; and set out, walking by day and sleeping by night in the trees, until after a month I came to the beach of the salt sea. I had rested there for an hour when I saw a ship coming up with a favourable breeze out of the sea. I hid behind a rock and waited. After there had been a good deal of coming and going among the crew I screwed up my courage and leapt into the ship. "Chase the ill-omened beast out of that!" cried one of the men. "No, kill it!" cried another. "Yes, kill it with a sword!" cried out a third. At this I caught the sword with my paw and burst into bitter tears.

Because of my tears the captain had pity on me and said to those about him: "This ape has asked for my protection and I give it him. Let no one take hold of him or chase him or interfere with him." Then the captain called me to him and spoke kind words to me, all of which I understood; finally making me his servant on the boat, in which duty I did everything correctly for him throughout the voyage.

Favouring winds carried us, after fifty days, to a city so great and so populous that Allah alone could count the people of it. As we cast anchor, certain officers of the king of that place came and welcomed the merchants we had aboard and gave them with the kind greetings of the king, a roll of parchment on which each man was commanded to inscribe a line in his fairest writing. For the King's wazir, a great caligraphist, had died and the king had sworn to appoint no one in his place who could not write as well as he.

Ape that I was, I snatched the parchment from their hands and fled away with it so that they were afraid that I would tear it and throw it into the water. Some were trying to coax me and some to kill me, when I made a sign that I wished to write. Then said the captain: "Let him write. If he only scribbles and messes we can stop him, but if he writes with a fair writing I shall adopt him as my son; for never in my life have I seen an ape so learned."

I took the reed pen and, leaning on the pad of the inkpot, carefully spread ink on both faces of the reed and began to write.

I improvised four stanzas, each in different character and style: the first in *rikaa:*

The Giver has been sung since time was new,
But Givers with a hand like yours are few;
So first and foremost we will look to God,
And when he fails us we will look to You.

The second in *rihani:*

I'll tell you of this Pen; it is of those
Pens that are mightier than cedar bows.
He holds it in five fingers of his hand,
And from it pour five rivers of pure Prose.

The third in *suls:*

I'll tell you of his Immortality—
He is so certain of eternity,
It is his aim to write such things of Him
As that last Critic shall not blush to see.

And the fourth in *muhakkak:*

Ink is the strongest drug that God has made;
If you can write of beauty unafraid,
You will be praising Him who gave the ink
More than all prayers unlearned men have prayed.

When I had finished writing, I handed back the parchment and each of the others, marvelling at what I had done, also wrote a line in the fairest script that he could compass.

Slaves bore the parchment back to the king and of all the writings he was only satisfied with mine, inscribed as they were in four different styles for which, when I had been a prince, I had been famed throughout the whole world.

So the king said to his friends and to his slaves: "Go all of you to this master of fair writing, give him this robe of honour to put on, mount him on the most magnificent of my mules, and bring him to me in a triumph of musical instruments."

They all smiled when he said this, so the king became angry and cried: "How is this? I give you an order and you laugh at me?" "King of all time," they answered, "we would never dare to laugh at any word you said; but we must tell you that the writer of these splendid characters is no man but an ape belonging to a ship's captain." The king was first astonished at their words and then convulsed with spacious laughter. "I shall buy that ape," he said, and he ordered all the people of his court to go down to the boat and fetch the ape ashore, taking with them both the mule and robe of honour. "Yes, yes," he added, "certainly you must clothe him in this robe and bring him to me mounted on the mule."

All of them came down straightway to the boat and bought me at a great price from the captain, who found it hard to let me go. Then they dressed me in the robe of honour, after I had signed to the captain my grief at leaving him, set me upon the mule, and conducted me through the city to the noise of harmonious instruments. You may imagine that every soul in those streets was stricken with wonder and admiration at such an unusual sight.

When I was brought before the king, I kissed the earth between his hands three times and stood still in front of him. He invited me to sit down and I did so with such grace that all who were there, but especially the king, marvelled at my good education and the politeness of my behaviour. When I was seated, the king sent all away except his chief eunuch, a young favourite slave, and myself.

Then, to my delight, he ordered food; and slaves brought a cloth laid with all manner of meats and delicacies which the soul could possibly desire. The king signed to me to eat; so, after rising and kissing the earth between his hands according to seven different schools of politeness, I sat down again in my best manner and began to eat, diligently recalling the education of my youth at every point.

Finally, when the cloth was drawn, I rose, washed my hands, and returning to the king, took up an ink-pot, a reed, and a sheet of parchment. On the last I inscribed these few lines celebrating the excellence of Arabian pastries:

Sweet fine pastries
Rolled between white fingers,
Fried things, whose fat scent lingers
On him who in his haste tries
To eat enough;
Pastries, my love!

Kenafa, swimming in butter,
Bearded with right vermicelli,
God has not given my belly
Half of the right words to utter

Of Kenafa's sweetness
And syrup'd completeness.

Kenafa lies on the table,
Isled in a sweet brown oil.
Would I not wander and toil
Seventy years to be able
To eat in Paradise
Kenafa's subtleties?

Finishing, I put down the reed and the sheet and, while the king looked in astonishment at what I had written, sat respectfully at a distance. "But how can an ape compass such a thing?" asked the king. "As Allah lives, it surpasses all the marvels of history."

Just then they brought the king his chess board and, when he had asked me by signs if I played and I had nodded my head to show him that I did, I arranged the pieces and we settled down to play. Twice I beat him and he did not know what to think of it, saying: "If this was a man, he would be the wisest man of all our time," and to his eunuch he continued: "Go to our daughter and tell her to come quickly to us, for I wish your mistress to enjoy the sight of this remarkable ape."

The eunuch went out and soon returned with the princess, his young mistress, who as soon as she set eyes on me covered her face with her veil, saying: "Father, what has possessed you to send for me into the presence and sight of a strange man?" "Daughter," answered the king, "here are only my young slave who is still a little boy, the eunuch who brought you up, this ape, and your father. Why do you cover your face?" Then she said: "Know, my father, that this ape is a prince, his father is the King Aymarus, ruler of a land far in the interior. The ape is bewitched by the Ifrit Jarjaris, of the line of Eblis, who has also killed his own wife, daughter of King Aknamus, master of the Isle of Ebony. This which you think an ape is not only a man, but a learned, wise, and educated man as well."

"Is it true, what my daughter says of you?" asked the king, looking at me fixedly in his astonishment. I nodded and begun to weep; so the king, turning to his daughter, asked her how she knew that I was bewitched. "Father," she answered, "when I was little there was an old woman in my mother's house, a sorceress knowing all the shifts and formulas of witchcraft, who taught me magic. Since then I have studied even more deeply and now know nearly a hundred and seventy codes of necromancy by the least of which I could remove your palace, with all its stones, even the whole city itself, to the other side of Mount Kaf and turn your country to a sheet of water in which the people should swim in the form of fishes."

"Then by the truth of the name of Allah," cried the king, "take off the witchcraft from this poor young man and I will make him my wazir. It is strange indeed that you should have such art and I did not know it. Take off the witchcraft quickly, for he is both polite and wise."

"With all my heart and as a duty," answered the princess.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Fourteenth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the second kalendar thus continued his say to the mistress of the house:

The princess took in her hands a knife on which were graved words in the Hebrew tongue and with it traced a circle in the middle of the palace which she filled with names of power and talismanic lines. This preparation completed, she stood in the middle of the circle murmuring words of magic import and reading from a book so old that none might understand it. After a few minutes of this, the palace became dark with shadows so thick that we thought to be buried alive under the ruins of the world. Suddenly the Ifrit Jarjaris stood before us in his most frightful and repellent guise, with hands like hayforks, legs like masts, and eyes like crucibles of fire. We were all driven to the confines of terror except the princess, who said: "I have no welcome for you; I have no greeting." Then said the Ifrit: "How can you break your word, O traitress? Did we not swear together that neither would use power against the other, nor interfere with the other's doings? Perfidious one, well have you deserved the fate which is about to overtake you—thus!" On the instant he turned into a savage lion which opened wide its throat and hurled itself upon the princess. But as quick as light she plucked a hair from her head and whispered magic words to it so that it became a sharp sword with which she cut the lion in two. Then we saw the lion's head become a scorpion which scuttled towards the young girl's heel to bite it; but in the nick of time, she changed to a mighty serpent which threw itself upon the naughty scorpion, and battled with it for a long while. The scorpion escaping, turned into a vulture, and the snake became an eagle, which flew at the vulture and put it to flight. The pursuit lasted for an hour until the vulture became a black cat and the girl turned suddenly into a wolf. Long and long in the middle of the palace the cat and the wolf were locked in deadly strife till the cat, seeing that it was being vanquished, turned into a very large red pomegranate which leapt into the basin of the fountain in the courtyard. The wolf jumped in after it and was about to seize it when the pomegranate rose up into the air. But it was too heavy to be sustained there and so fell with a thump on the marble and broke in pieces, the seeds of it escaping one by one and covering the whole floor of the courtyard. On this the wolf changed to a cock who pecked at the seeds and swallowed them one by one till only a single seed remained. Just as the cock was about to swallow this last one, it fell from his beak—in this you may perceive the hand of Destiny and the will of Fate—and lodged in a crack of the marble near the basin so that the cock could not find it. Thereupon the cock crowed, beat his wings, and signed to us with his beak; but we did not understand what he would say to us. At last it gave so terrible a cry that we, who could not understand what it wished, thought that the palace was falling about us. Round and round, in the middle of the courtyard, trotted the cock until it found the last seed in the crack near the basin. But, when the cock had fetched it out and was about to eat it, the seed fell into the water and became a fish which swam to the bottom. So the cock turned to a whale of prodigious size which leapt into the water and sank in pursuit of the fish so that we did not see it again for a whole hour. At the end of this time we heard agonised cries coming from the water and trembled for fear. Out of the basin appeared the Ifrit in his own form, but all on fire, as if he were a burning coal, with smoke leaping from his eyes and mouth and nose. Behind him appeared the princess in her own form; but she also was all on fire as if she were made of molten metal; and she rushed after the Ifrit who was now bearing down on us. We were all terrified of being burnt alive and were on the point of throwing ourselves into the water, when the Ifrit halted us with a terrible cry and leaping upon us in the midst of the hall which gave upon the courtyard, blew fire in our faces. But the princess caught up with him and blew fire in his, so that flames fell on us from both of them. Those coming from her were harmless to us, but a spark shot off from him destroyed my left eye for ever, another burnt all the lower part of the king's face, his beard and his mouth, making his lower teeth fall out, while a third, falling upon the eunuch's breast, burnt him to death upon the instant.

All this time the young girl was pursuing the Ifrit and blowing fire at him. Suddenly we heard a voice calling: "Only Allah is great! Only Allah is strong! He breaks and destroys the renegade who denies Mohammad, master of the world!" It was the princess who spoke, pointing at the same time to the Ifrit who had been burnt to a mass of cinders. Coming to us the princess said: "Quick, fetch me a glass of water!" When it was brought, she chanted certain incomprehensible words over it and sprinkled me with the water saying: "Be freed, in the name and by the truth of the only Truth! Yea, by the truth of the name of Almighty Allah, return to your first shape!''

On this I became a man as I had been before, except that I was still blind of one eye. ''Poor youth,'' said the princess, by way of consolation; ''Fire will be fire.'' She said the same also to her father on account of his burnt beard and lost teeth; and at last she said: ''Father, I must die; for it is written. Had the Ifrit but been a man I could have killed him at the first attempt. It was the spilling of the pomegranate seed that was my undoing, for the grain I could not eat was that which held the whole soul of the Jinni. If only I could have found it he would have been dead upon the instant; but alas, I could not. It was written. So I was obliged to fight terrible battles below the earth and in the air and under the water; and each time he opened a door of safety I opened a door of danger, until at last he opened the terrible door of fire. When that door is opened there is death toward. Fate allowed me to burn him before I was burnt myself. Ere I killed him I tried to make him embrace our faith, the blessed Law of Islam; but he would not and I burned him. Now I die. May Allah fill my place for you.''

After this she wrestled with the fire till black sparks sprang up and mounted to her breast and to her face. When they reached her face she cried out weeping: ''I bear witness that there is no God but Allah! I bear witness that Mohammad is his messenger!'' and fell a heap of cinders by the side of the Ifrit.

We mourned for her, and I wished that I could have died in her place rather than see her radiant form go down in ashes, this little princess who had freed me; but the word of Allah may not be gainsaid.

When the king saw his daughter fall down in cinders, he tore away the little remnant of his beard, beat his cheeks, and rent his garments. I did the same and we both wept over her until the chamberlains and the chief men of the court came and found their sultan fainting and weeping beside two piles of ashes. For an hour, in great stupefaction, they walked round and round the king not daring to speak, until at last he recovered himself a little and told them all that had happened to his daughter. Then they cried: "Allah, Allah, the great grief! The great calamity!"

Lastly came the women and the women slaves who mourned for seven days and lamented over her in due form.

When the week was up the king ordered a mighty tomb to be built over the ashes of his child, this being done by forced labour at the same hour, candles and lanterns being lighted by it both day and night. The ashes of the Ifrit were committed to the air, under the curse of Allah.

Worn out by these griefs and duties, the sultan fell into a sickness which looked to be mortal and lasted for a whole month. When his strength had come back to him a little, he called me to him and said: "Young man, before you came we lived here in eternal happiness, safe harboured from the assaults of fortune; but with your coming came also the bitterest of all afflictions. Would we had never seen your ill-omened face; your face which brought down desolation on us. First, you have caused the death of my daughter whose life was worth the lives of a hundred men; second, you were the reason of my being burnt and of the loss and spoiling of my teeth; third, through you my poor eunuch, that faithful servant who had reared my daughter, was killed outright. And yet it is not your fault, nor is the remedy yours; what came to us and to you, came from Allah. Praise be to Him, then, who allowed my daughter to free you even at the price of her own life. Yes, it is Destiny, it is Destiny. Leave our country, then, my child, for we have suffered enough because of you. Yet it was all written before by Allah; so go your way in peace."

Mistress, I went out from before the king hardly believing that I was still alive and not knowing at all where to go. In my heart I pondered all that had happened to me from beginning to end; how I had escaped safe from the desert robbers, how I had entered as stranger into a city and met the tailor there, my sweet amour with the young girl below the earth, my deliverance from the hands of the Ifrit, my life as an ape, servant to a ship's captain, my purchase at a great price by the King because of my excellent handwriting, my freeing from the spell, and, last and most piteous, the adventure that had lost me my eye. Nevertheless I thanked Allah, saying: "Better an eye than a life," and went down to the Hammam to bathe before leaving the city. It was there, my lady, that I shaved my beard so that I might travel in safety in the guise of a kalendar. Each day since then I have not ceased to weep and think of my wrongs, especially the loss of my left eye and so thinking I have felt my right eye blinded by tears so that I could not see and have not been able to resist saying over the following stanzas of the poet:

It was only after the blow
I knew my sorrow could hurt me so;
How then could Allah know?

I will abide those whips of His,
That the world may know iniquities
More bitter than patience is.

Patience has beauty, I've understood,
When it's practised by one of the Good;
But Fate is a thing more rude.

For Fate was probably setting a snare,
When you were born, whoever you were,
To take your old feet there.

She knew the secrets of my bed
And more than so; but she lay dead
Where the Jinni cut off her head.

To him who prates of joy down here
Say: soon you'll taste a day bitter
As the quick sap of the myrrh.

I left that city and journeyed through many lands aiming ever for Baghdad, the city of Peace, where I hoped to tell all my tale to the Prince of Believers. Tonight I reached Baghdad after many long and weary days. By chance I met this other kalendar and, while we were talking together we were rejoined by our third companion, also a kalendar. Recognising each other as strangers we wended our way in the darkness together till the kind hand of Destiny led us to your house, my mistress.

This is the story of my shaved beard and lost eye.

When she had heard the tale of the second kalendar the mistress of the house said to him: "Your tale is truly strange; make your bow and depart with all speed."

But he answered: "Indeed, I shall not stir from here until I have heard the tale of my third companion."

So the third kalendar advanced and said:

TALE OF THE THIRD KALENDAR

Glorious lady, do not think that my tale will be as marvellous as those of my two companions; for it is infinitely more so!

Upon these other two, misfortunes fell solely through the workings of Destiny and Fate; but with me it was not so. The reason of my shaved beard and my lost eye lies in myself, who, through my own fault, was led to the end of fatality and filled to the overflowing of my heart with cares and disappointments.

I am a king and the son of a king. When my father, whose name was Kassib, died I inherited his throne and reigned with justice and to the advantage of my people.

But I had a great love for seafaring which I was enabled to indulge since my city lay by the sea and many fortified islands in the ocean were under my protection. Wishing one day to visit all my islands, I prepared ten great ships and, victualling them for a month, set sail. My voyage of inspection lasted for twenty days at the end of which time contrary winds were unloosed against us, blowing throughout the night until the morning. At sunrise, when the wind fell and the sea became calm, we saw a little island at which we landed and ate and rested for two days. When the tempest was quite abated, we set sail again and voyaged for another twenty days until we lost our way in unknown waters, strange even to the captain. When he confessed that he did not know that sea at all, we sent a look-out man to the mast-head, who returned, saying to the captain: "On my right I saw fishes swimming upon the surface of the sea; and in the middle of the sea, I could distinguish far off a thing which showed black and white by turns.'' The captain seemed thunderstruck by these words of the look-out; he threw his turban on the deck and snatched at his beard, crying: ''Here is death for all! Not one of us will come out alive!'' Seeing him weeping, we also wept for ourselves and I asked him to explain his words and those of the look-out man. Then said the Captain: ''My lord, for eleven days we have been lost and there is no favouring wind that may bear us back into our course. The appearance of that black and white object and of the fish means that tomorrow we will come to an isle of black rocks called the Magnetic Mountain against which the force of the water will dash us and destroy our ship. All her nails will fly from her and cleave to the sides of the Magnetic Mountain, for Allah has made it so that it draws all things of iron to itself. Allah alone knows what mass of iron things are clinging to those rocks. On the top of the mountain there is a dome of brass lifted on ten columns and upon this dome stands a rider mounted upon a brazen horse with a brazen spear in his hand and a plate of graven lead upon his breast, bearing unknown and talismanic names. Know, my king, that so long as that rider stays upon his horse all ships which pass below shall be broken to pieces, their sailors drowned, and all their nails and iron-work drawn to the mountain. Until that rider is thrown from his horse there can be no safety.'' After telling me this, the captain burst into tears, and we, having resigned ourselves to death, said our farewells to each other.

Hardly had morning come when, as he had said, we reached the mountain of black magnetic rocks, the waves drove us alongside, and all the thousands of nails on our ten ships, with all their other iron-work, were suddenly wrenched away and flew to join themselves to the mountain. The ships opened out and fell asunder and we were thrown into the sea.

All day we floated at the mercy of the waves, most of us were drowned and the few survivors never met again, for the billows and terrible winds dispersed them in every direction.

But Allah, Who is Almighty, preserved me, Madam, for greater evils and for greater pain. I clung to a plank and the waves threw me ashore at the foot of the Magnetic Mountain.

I found a path leading upwards made of steps hewn in the rock; so I called on the name of Almighty Allah and . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Fifteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that while his companions sat round with folded arms, brooded over by the seven negroes with drawn swords, the third kalendar thus continued his tale to the young mistress of the house:

I called on the name of Almighty Allah and prayed to him with very great fervour; so that He stayed the wind and I was able to climb by juts and clefts to the top of the mountain. Here I rejoiced at my deliverance and, reaching the brass dome, knelt down and gave thanks to Allah.

Broken by fatigue, I fell where I was upon the earth and slept; and in my sleep I heard a voice saying to me: "When you wake, O son of Kassib, dig beneath your feet and you will find a brazen bow and three leaden arrows, carved with talismans. Take the bow and shoot the rider who is above this dome; so shall you deliver the world from a great scourge. When you have shot the rider, he will fall from his horse into the sea and the bow will fall from your hand upon the earth. Bury it where it has fallen and straightway the sea will begin to boil and rise up to this summit where you are. When this happens, you will see a boat coming from the ocean with a man in it who shall be like, but other than, the rider. He will be carrying sculls in his hand and it will be safe for you to get into the boat with him if you do not name the sacred name of Allah. This you must not do at any price. Once in the boat, that man will row you for ten days until you come to the sea of Safety, where you will find one to convey you to your own country; but remember, none of this can happen unless you abstain from naming the Holy Name."

So I woke and did as I had been told in my dream. With the bow and arrows that I found I shot the rider and he fell into the sea. I buried the bow where it had dropped and at once the sea began to boil and rose up to the top of the mountain. In a few moments I saw a boat coming to me out of the sea, at the sight of which I secretly thanked Allah. In it was a man of brass bearing on his breast a plate of lead, graven with names and talismans. Without a word I climbed aboard and the man of brass rowed me for one, for two, for three, for ten whole days until, in the evening, islands appeared that were to be my safety. I rejoiced with the extreme of joy and in the fulness of my gratitude to the Most High, I named and glorified the name of Allah, saying: "In the name of Allah!

There is no God but Allah!" Hardly had I breathed the sacred words than the man of brass caught hold of me and threw me into the sea, himself making off swiftly in the boat. I was a good swimmer and so kept myself afloat all day until nightfall when, my arms and shoulders being dead and weary, I made my peace with Allah and prepared to die. A wave higher than all the waves of the sea ran up beneath me like a mighty mosque and threw me far on to the shore of one of the islands which I had seen. Thus Allah's will was done.

I climbed up the beach and, spreading my clothes to dry upon the sand, slept by them all night. When I awoke, I put on my dry garments and, looking about me, beheld a little fertile valley. Wandering round and throughout this place, I found that I was on the smallest of islets lying alone in the sea. I was sitting, buried in sad reflections, saying to myself: "Never am I delivered from one misfortune but I fall into a greater!" and wishing earnestly for death, when I saw a ship beating up towards the island. Fearing that there might still be some unpleasant fate awaiting me, I climbed into a tree and, sitting hidden among the leaves, saw the ship anchor and ten slaves come out of her, each carrying a spade. They walked to the middle of the island and dug there until they had discovered a trap door which they opened. Then they returned to the ship and took out of her a great quantity of things which they loaded on their shoulders: bread and corn, honey and butter, sheep and bursting sacks, even down to the least thing which a master of a house might require. They kept on coming and going from the ship to the trap door and back again until all the heavy things had been transported. Afterwards they brought out beautiful robes and exquisitely tailored garments which they carried on their arms; and, this time, I saw walking among the slaves a venerable old man all eaten up by time, so that he might no longer be called a man at all. He led by the hand a boy of surprising beauty, cast from that very mould in which Allah had made perfection; his beauty was at once amorous and pure, his body being as slender and as pliant as a young green branch, so that he bewitched the heart out of my bosom and made all the texture of my flesh tremble in love. They all descended by the trap door, but returned in a few minutes without the boy and, going down to the ship, set sail and left the shore.

When they were out of sight, I came down from my tree and ran to the place where they had heaped the earth over the trap door. I dug the earth away again and, though the trap which I discovered was as great and heavy as a mill-stone, by Allah's grace I lifted it by myself and, descending a vaulted stone stair which I saw below, came at last to the bottom. Walking forward I found a great hall, richly carpeted and hung with silks and velvets and on a low divan, between lighted candles, flower vases, and pots of fruits and sweetmeats, I saw the boy sitting, fanning himself with a costly fan. He was terrified at the sight of me, but I wished him peace and, when he had answered me, said: "Have no fear, my lord, I am a man, a king's son, and a king myself. Allah has guided me here to free you from this sunless place where they have left you to die. I will deliver you and you shall be my friend, for but by looking at you I have lost my head."

The boy smiled at me with those sweet lips of his and invited me to sit down beside him on the couch, saying: "My lord, I have not been left in this place to die, but to avoid death. You must know that I am the son of a jeweller, famed throughout all the world for the amount and quality of his riches, his name having gone out into all lands, borne by the caravans he sends afar to sell jewels to the kings and princes of the earth. Though I was born late in his life, my father was warned by the masters of prophecy that I should die before either of my parents, so that, in spite of his joy at my birth and the great happiness of my mother who, by the grace of God, had brought me into the world at the full end of her nine months, he grieved bitterly on my account. And the more so did he do this when the sages who had read my destiny in the stars told him that I would be killed by a king, son of a king named Kassib, forty days after he had cast the brass rider of the Magnetic Mountain into the sea. Because of his forebodings my father, the jeweller, tended me carefully at home until I was fifteen years of age. When he heard that the rider had been thrown into the sea, he wept so sorely (and my mother with him) that his colour failed him, his body pined, and he became suddenly a very old man broken by years and by sorrows. Then it was that he fetched me to this subterranean place, which he had made ready since my birth, to hide me from the king who was to kill me after he had thrown down the brass rider. Both my father and I were certain that the son of Kassib could not find me on this unknown island. That is the reason of my staying here."

Then I thought in my heart: "What liars are these men who read the stars; for by Allah I would rather kill myself than kill this boy who has become, as it were, a flame about my heart." Aloud I said: "My child, the Almighty would never allow a flower like you to be cut down. I will defend you and stay with you here all my life.'' Then said he. ''My father will be coming at the end of the fortieth day to take me away; for after that there will be no more danger.'' ''Then, dear youth,'' I answered, ''I will stay with you for the forty days and afterwards ask your father to let you come with me to my kingdom to be my friend and heir.''

The jeweller's son thanked me with gentle words and I rejoiced at his air of breeding and at the love which had sprung up between us. We talked for a long while and ate of all those delicacies and provisions which were enough to last a hundred guests for a year. Afterwards I proved the greatness of my love for his charms; and then we lay down and slept all night. Rising at dawn, I washed and carried the boy a copper basin filled with perfumed water, in which he made his ablutions. I prepared food and we ate together, passed the day in talk and laughter and games until the evening and then, when night fell, spread the cloth. We feasted on mutton stuffed with almonds, dried grapes and muscat nuts, cloves and pepper; we drank fair fresh water and ate both water-melons and melons, with cakes of butter and honey, pastries sweet and light as the hair of a girl in which neither butter nor honey, almonds nor cinnamon were lacking. Then, as on the night before, we lay down together and I proved how great our friendship had become. So we stayed in alternate pleasure and rest until the fortieth day.

Now when that day came on which we expected the jeweller, the boy wished to take a full bath; so I warmed water for him in a great cauldron heated over a wood fire and poured it into a large copper bath. I added cool water until the heat was pleasant and, when the boy got in, I washed him myself, rubbing, kneading, and perfuming him; and finally carrying him back to the bed where I covered him with a quilt, swathed his head in silver embroidered silks, and gave him a delicate sherbert to drink.

When he rose from a peaceful sleep, he wished to eat, so I chose the finest and largest of the watermelons, putting it on a plate by his side, and climbed on the bed to reach a large knife which was hung on the wall above his head. But the boy began to tickle my leg in sport and I felt his tickling so much that I fell forward on top of him, the knife being driven right through his heart. There and then he died under my hand.

Mistress, you can imagine how I beat my face, weeping and groaning and tearing my garments, and throwing myself upon the earth in floods of tears; but my friend was dead, his destiny was accomplished to prove that the astrologers had not lied. I lifted my eyes and hands to heaven, saying: "Master, of the world, if this is my crime I am ready for punishment." I was full of courage to face my death; but whether one asks a good thing or a bad it is never granted.

Not being able to bear the sight of the place any more and knowing also that the jeweller, his father, would be coming at the end of the day, I climbed the stairs, shut the trap, and covered it over with earth as before.

Now that I was out in the free air, I said to myself: "It is quite necessary that I see what happens; but at the same time I must hide or be put to the worst of deaths by the ten slaves." So I climbed into a great tree near the trap and waited, hiding myself in the leaves. An hour afterwards the same ship came in from the sea and the old man with his slaves landed and hastened inshore until they came beneath my tree. Seeing that the earth had been freshly moved they were suddenly stricken with fear; the old man looked as if he had lost his wits, but the slaves feverishly cleared the earth away and all went down through the trap door. I heard the old man calling his son by name in a high voice, but the boy did not answer and, when they looked for him, lo he was dead upon the bed, pierced to the heart with a knife.

At this terrible sight the old man fainted away; and the slaves, sobbing and sighing, bore him on their shoulders up the stairs, and went back for the dead boy whom they wrapped in a winding sheet and buried in the earth. Lastly, they carried the old man and all the provisions and riches that were left in the hall down to the ship and sailed away until they were out of sight.

I climbed from my tree and walked round and round the little island all that day and the next night, companioned only by my tears and the desolation of my heart. In a few days I saw that the sea was falling hour by hour leaving dry sand between the isle and the mainland. I thanked Allah that he had at last delivered me from that ill-omened island and, crossing over the sand, came to the opposite coast and climbed up on to firm ground. I wandered till sunset, invoking His name and suddenly saw afar off a great red fire towards which I made my way, thinking that there must be men there cooking a sheep. But when I drew near I saw that the red fire was really the sun at his setting shining on a mighty palace all of brass. I was astonished to see so great a palace of brass and was admiring the great strength of its construction when ten young men came out of its gate. They were all of surpassing beauty both of face and form but, marvellous to relate, each was blind of his left eye; a tall and venerable old man, who walked with them, alone having two.

As I was considering the coincidence of all these lost left eyes, the ten young men came up and greeted me and I greeting them likewise, told them all my adventure. But, since you know it, it would be useless to tell it to you a second time, my mistress.

When they had ceased marvelling at my tale, they bade me a spacious welcome to their palace. We entered it, crossing many halls with costly hangings, and came at last to the central court which was greater and more beautiful than any of the halls. In its midst were ten carpets spread on mattresses and an eleventh carpet without a mattress lay between them. On this the old man sat down while the young men stretched themselves on their couches, saying to me: "My lord, be seated higher up the hall and ask no questions, we pray you, on anything you see pass here."

After he had rested a little the old man rose and, moving backwards and forwards, brought meat and drink to the ten and to me. When we had finished eating and drinking the old man cleared away the remains and was about to seat himself again when the youths cried out: "Why do you seat yourself before bringing us the things necessary for our vows?" The old man left the court without speaking and in ten journeys brought back as many basins covered over with satin and as many little lanterns. These he set beside the young men, but for me he brought nothing. When each had lifted the stuff which covered his basin I saw with surprise that they contained ashes, lampblack, and kohl, with which the young men weeping and wailing and crying: "It was our own fault!" abased themselves. They sprinkled the ashes on their heads, rubbed the lamp-black on their faces, and smeared their right eyes with the kohl. At dawn, after washing in other basins which the old man brought them, they changed their clothes and became as they had been the day before.

Though I almost died with astonishment at what I had seen, I dared ask no question either then or on the next three nights when the same performance was repeated. But at last I could contain myself no longer and called out to them: "My lords, I would rather die than not hear the cause of the loss of your eyes and the reason of what you do with the ashes, the lamp-black, and the kohl." "Why do you ask that, unhappy man?" they answered. "You are lost, you are lost!" Then said I: "I would rather be lost than endure this curiosity." "Beware for your left eye!" they said. And I answered: "What use is my left eye to me if I have to live all my life in curiosity?" "On your own head be it then," they said, "what has happened to us will happen to you and it will be your own fault. Also, when you have lost your left eye you will not be able to come back here; for we are already ten and there is no place for an eleventh."

While the old man brought in a live sheep, which he slew and flayed they continued: "You will be sewn in this sheep skin and put out on the brass terrace of our palace. Then the mighty bird, the Roc, who can lift an elephant, will take you for a sheep, swoop down on you, and bearing you into the clouds carry you to the top of a high mountain, inaccessible to men, in order to eat you at his ease. But you must slit the skin with a knife that we shall give you and come out of it; for the terrible Roc does not eat humans: so when he sees you he will fly away. You must walk from that place till you come to a palace ten times larger than ours and a thousand times more lovely. It is plated with plates of gold and all its walls are crusted with emeralds and pearls. Enter by the open door, as each of us has entered, and you shall see what you shall see. All of us have lost our left eyes and spend each night in expiation. That is the chief point of all our stories; for, were they told in detail, they would fill the pages of a great folio. Be it on your own head."

Seeing that I was fixed in my intention, they gave me the knife, sewed me in the sheep skin, and laid me on the terrace. Suddenly I was snatched up by that terrible bird, the Roc, who flew away with me and set me down on the top of a mountain. I ripped the skin up with my knife and jumped out, crying: "Kesh, kesh!" to frighten the Roc. As it flew heavily away, I saw that it had the appearance of a great white bird as broad as ten elephants and as tall as twenty camels.

I lost no time in setting out and, walking in a fever of impatience, came at noon to the palace of which I had been told. In spite of the description given of it by the ten young men I had not looked for a hundredth part of the marvel of that beautiful palace. I went through its great gate, which was all of gold, and found that there were about it ninety-nine aloe and sandal wood doors and that the doors of all the halls of the palace were of ebony inlaid with gold and diamonds. Each led to halls and gardens in which I caught glimpses of the massed treasures of earth and sea.

In the first hall I found myself surrounded by forty young girls, of such transcendent beauty that it was impossible to make a choice among them or to look on them without faintness.

They rose when they saw me and in the sweetest voices said: "May our house be as your house, joyful companion; may you be as the apple of our eyes!" They set me upon a dais and, sitting below me on a rich rug, called to me: "Dear lord, we are your slaves, your things; you are our master, and your presence is as a crown about our heads!"

One brought me water and warm linens and washed my feet; one poured perfumed water from a ewer over my hands; one robed me in a silken garment with a belt of gold and silver threads; one gave me a cup holding a delicate drink perfumed with flowers; one looked at me; one smiled at me; one winked at me; one said verses to me; one lifted her arms above her head for me to see; one twisted her body above her thighs before me; one said: "Ah!" and another said: "Oh!"; one said: "Dear!" and one said: "Sweet!"; one said: "Darling!" and one said: "Love!" and one said: "Fire above my heart!"

They clustered round me, stroking and caressing me, saying: "Tell us your story, dear companion. We have been here for many weary days without a man but now our happiness is complete." Managing to calm myself a little I told them part of my tale until the approach of evening.

As the light failed they brought in so many candles that the hall was lighted as if the sun himself had come down into it. They laid cloths and served the most exquisite meats, the most exciting drinks; they played on instruments of music, sang in magic voices, and danced sensuously about me as I ate.

After the amusements, they said: "Dear one, the time has come for bed for the pleasures of the day are at an end; so choose one of us and do not fear to offend any of us, for each of us forty sisters will have our turn with you on every fortieth night as it comes round."

As all were so desirable, I shut my eyes and stretching out my arm seized hold of one; I opened my eyes and then shut them again quickly at the blaze of the beauty of the girl I had caught. I was as one stricken dumb, as one who has eaten hashish and has not his wits about him. She signalled for me to rise and then she took my hand and led me to a courtyard in which there were four fountains, one at each corner and from each fountain sprang jets of perfumed water. In the center of this courtyard was her bed.

This was the life I led, my lady, one of the sisters being with me each night. Paradise itself can hold no fairer garden of houris than was this. Thus, in love and in rest, a year slipped away; and each night, the girl of the next night would take me in the morning to the bath, wash me, rub me and perfume me with all the perfumes that Allah has given to his servants.

On the morning of the last day of the year, all the girls ran to my bed, weeping, dishevelling their hair and lamenting. "Light of our eyes," they said, "we must leave you as we have left others before you. For you are not the first and many a youth has stayed with us before. But you are the mightiest of them all, with a charm that is all your own; indeed you are the naughtiest and gentlest of them all. Truly we cannot live without you." "Tell me why you must leave me," I exclaimed, "for all the joy of my life is centred upon you!" "We are all the daughters of a king by different mothers," they answered. "Since we came to development we have lived in this palace and each year Allah has sent some youth upon our road. But every year we have to go away for forty days to see our father and our mothers and now the time has come." "Sweetest creatures," I said, "I will stay in the house, thanking Allah for what he has given me, until you come back." "Be it so!" they said. "Here are all the keys of all the doors of the palace. It is your home, you are its master; but beware of opening the copper door at the bottom of the garden, for if you do you will never see us again and a great evil will befall you. Beware of opening the copper door."

One by one they clung to me weeping and saying farewell. Then all gave me a last sad look and went away.

When they had gone, I left the hall with the keys in my hand and began a tour of inspection throughout the palace. For so chained had my body and soul been to the beds of these girls that I had not had time to visit it all before.

Opening the first door with the first key, I saw a garden filled with fruit trees, finer than I had ever seen in all the world. They were watered with little runlets and their fruits were of immortal size and loveliness. I ate of them all, especially bananas, finger-long dates, pomegranates, apples, and peaches. When I had finished, I gave thanks to Allah, and made my way to the second door.

I opened it, and at once the senses of my eyes and nose were charmed by a multitude of flowers filling a great garden and refreshed by little streams. All flowers that may be found in princes' gardens were there; jasmin, narcissus, rose, and violet; jacinth, anemone, carnation, and tulips, with the ranunculus and every flower of every clime. When I had smelt a jasmin and thrust it up my nose, leaving it there so that I might go on breathing its sweetness, I thanked Allah for his goodness, and went to the third door.

No sooner had I opened it than my ears were ravished with the notes of coloured birds, every kind that there is upon the earth. They were held in a vast cage made from aloe and sandal wood rods. The water for their drinking was held in little saucers, some of jade and some of delicately tinted jasper. The seed for them to eat lay in little gold cups; the floor of the cage was sanded and sprinkled, and the birds all sang in praise of their creator. I listened to their notes till nightfall, and then slept.

Next morning, I went quickly out and opened the fourth door with the fourth key. Then, mistress, I saw things, which no man ever beheld before even in a dream. In the middle of a great court I saw a pavilion with porphyry staircases, each leading up to one of the forty ebony doors inlaid with gold and silver. These doors stood open, each showing a spacious hall within, holding a different treasure worth more than all the value of my kingdom. The first held ordered mounds of great and little pearls, the great exceeding the little in number, each as large as a dove's egg and shining like the moon at her full. The second hall was richer than the first, being filled to the roof with diamonds, red rubies, blue rubies which are sapphires, and glittering carbuncles. The third hall was heaped with emeralds; the fourth with masses of unwrought gold; the fifth with gold coins minted over all the earth; the sixth with virgin silver; the seventh with silver coins from every land. All precious stones from the bosom of the earth and of the seas filled the other halls. There were topaz, turquoise, hyacinth, Yemen stones, every colour of cornelian, jade vases, necklaces, bracelets, belts, and every jewel work that may be seen at the courts of kings.

I lifted my hands and gave thanks to Allah for all these good things and every day I opened one, two, or three doors until the fortieth day, being more and more astonished by each new marvel. When there remained only the key of the copper door and the end of the separation was at hand, I fell to thinking of my forty girls. Sweet memories thronged my mind. And I gave thanks to Allah that our separation was soon ended. I remembered their little cries of "Youh! my darling! Youh! my soul!"; and I cried aloud: "As Allah lives, tonight will be a blessed night, a white night!"

But the Evil One drove into my mind a thought of the key to the copper door. I was greatly tempted and I fell. I opened the copper door and could see nothing, but a blast of scent came out at me, so strong that I fell down in a faint outside the door which shut of itself. When I came to, I persisted in my hell-born resolution and, opening the door afresh, noticed that the odours were less strong. Entering, I found another spacious hall. It was strewn with saffron and lighted by candles perfumed with ambergris and incense; by splendid gold and silver lamps burning aromatic oils which filled the hall with a sweet heaviness. Among gold torches and gold lamps I saw a marvellous black horse with a white star on its forehead. His left hind-leg and his right fore-leg were stockinged in white, his saddle was brocaded, and his bridle was a gold chain. His manger was filled with well-winnowed sesame and barley, his trough held fresh water perfumed with roses. One of my great delights was in handsome horses and I was considered the finest rider in all my kingdom, so I thought that this beast would suit me well enough. I took it by the bridle and, leading it into the garden, mounted. As it did not go, I slashed it over the neck with the gold chain and at once it spread two mighty black wings which I had not seen, cried out with a terrible voice, and stamping the earth four times with its foot, shot up into the air.

The earth turned sickeningly beneath me, but I pressed my thighs together and kept my seat. At length the horse sank to earth on the terrace of that brass palace from which I had set out. At once it begun to buck and slide so violently that it threw me; and, as I lay on the ground, it ran at me and, lowering one of his wings, thrust out my left eye with the point of it. Then it rose into the air and disappeared.

I walked all about the terrace, holding one hand over my injured eye and clenching the other in grief. Soon the ten young men came out and saw me. "You would not listen to us," they cried, "now behold, the fruit of your rashness! We cannot receive you back among us; for we are already ten; but if you follow such and such a route you will come to the city of Baghdad, where dwells Haroun Al-Rachid, Prince of Believers, whose fame has reached even to us. Your fate will be in his hands."

I set out and, travelling day and night with a shaved beard and in the garments of a kalendar, came this night to Baghdad, the home of peace. Coming upon these other two, who had lost their left eyes, I greeted them saying: "I am a stranger." They answered that they too were strangers and so it was that the three of us came to your hospitable house.

This is the story of my lost eye and my shaved beard.

The young mistress of the house, when she had heard this extraordinary tale, said to the third kalendar: "Make your bow, and go your ways, for you are pardoned."

But he answered: "As Allah lives, I shall stay here till I have heard the stories of these others."

The young girl turned then to the khalifat, Giafar, and Massrur, asking for their stories. So Giafar went up and told her the fable that he had already told the portress at the door. After she had heard him, the girl said: "I will pardon you all; depart quickly and in peace."

When they were safely out in the road, the khalifat asked the kalendars whither they were going and, when they answered that they did not know, instructed Giafar to take them to his home and bring them before him in the morning so that he might see what could be done for them.

After Giafar had done his bidding, the khalifat returned to his palace, where he tried in vain to sleep. Early in the morning he rose and, maintaining his throne, held audience of all the chief men of his empire. When these had departed he turned to Giafar, saying: "Bring to me the three young girls and the two bitches and the three kalendars." Giafar brought them all forthwith and, when they stood before the khalifat, the girls being heavily veiled, addressed these words to them: "We hold you free of any unkindness; you knew not who we were and yet you pardoned us and treated us well. Now know that you have come into the hands of the fifth of the line of Abbas, Haroun Al-Rachid, the khalifat. It is unwise to tell him aught but the truth."

When Giafar had spoken for the Prince of Believers, the eldest girl came forward, saying: "Prince of Believers my story is so strange that if it were written with a needle on the corner of an eye yet would it serve as a lesson to the circumspect!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning, and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Sixteenth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the eldest of the young girls stood up before the Prince of Believers and told this story:

THE TALE OF ZOBEIDA, THE FIRST OF THE GIRLS

Prince of Believers, my name is Zobeida; my sister, who opened the door for you is Amina; and our youngest is called Fahima. We were all three born of the same father but not of the same mother; these two bitches, on the other hand, are full sisters to me, being born of the same father and the same mother. When our father died, leaving five thousand dinars to be divided equally among us, Amina and Fahima left us to live with their mother; while I and my two sisters lived together. I was the youngest of the three, though I am older than Amina and Fahima.

Soon after our father's death, my two elder sisters married and, in a little while, their husbands fitted out commercial ventures with their wives' inheritances and set sail, each taking his wife with him and leaving me alone.

My sisters were away for four years, and during that time, their husbands becoming bankrupt lost all their goods and made off, abandoning them among strangers in strange lands. After bitter sufferings, they managed to make their ways back to me, but they looked so like beggars that at first I did not recognise them. Yet when they spoke to me I knew who they were and questioned them tenderly as to what had happened. ‘‘Sister, words cannot help us now,’’ they answered, ‘‘Allah took the reed pen and wrote that it was to be.’’ I pitied them from the bottom of my heart, sent them to the bath, and put fair new garments upon them, saying: ‘‘Sisters, you are the elder, while I am the younger; you stand to me in the place of both father and mother. My inheritance, by Allah’s grace has prospered and increased. Come, use the profit of it as your own and live with me in honour and in peace.’’

I loaded them with benefits and they stayed with me for a year sharing my substance. But one day they said: ‘‘Marriage would be better for us; we cannot do without it any longer; we have no more patience with living alone.’’ ‘‘I fear that you will get little good from marriage,’’ I said, ‘‘for an honest man is hard to come by in these days. You tried marriage once; have you forgotten how you found it?’’

But they would not listen to me, being set on marrying without my consent; so I married them to husbands, giving them money and the necessary clothes. And the new husbands took them away as before.

It was not long, however, before the new husbands deceived them and decamped with all the dowry which I had provided. Naked and full of excuses, they returned to me, saying: ‘‘Do not blame us, we are older than you, but you are wiser than we. We promise never to say a word again on the subject of marriage.’’ ‘‘Dear welcome to you, my sisters,’’ I answered, ‘‘there are none dearer to me in the world than you.’’ So I kissed them and behaved bountifully towards them as before.

After they had lived with me for another year, it came into my head to fit out a ship with merchandise and voyage in it to do business at Bassora. So I got ready a vessel, filling it with merchandise and goods of all kinds as well as necessaries for the voyage. I asked my sisters whether they would rather stay at home while I was away or come with me. They decided to accompany me so I took them with me and we set sail. But first I divided my money into two halves, one of which I took with me and one of which I hid at home, in case some misfortune befell the ship and we escaped with our lives.

We sailed on night and day, but by ill-luck the captain lost his course; so that we were driven to the outer ocean and into a sea quite other than the one we had designed to reach. Driving before the wind for ten days, we saw at last a city far off and asked the captain what its name might be. "As Allah lives, I do not know," he answered. "I have never seen it in my life, nor the sea in which we are. But the important thing is that we are now out of danger. It only remains for you to enter that city and offer your merchandise. I suggest that you should sell it there if you can."

An hour later he came to us again, saying: "Disembark now and go into the city to see the marvels of Allah there. Call on His name and you shall go in safety."

We entered the city and saw to our stupefaction that all the inhabitants had been turned into black rocks; but that, while they had been petrified, everything else in the markets and the streets was as it had been, goods of all kinds and appointments of gold and silver all about the place. We were delighted with what we saw and saying to each other: "Surely there must be some extraordinary reason for all this," separated, each going in different directions about the streets, to collect as much as might be conveniently carried of gold, silver and precious fabrics.

It was towards the citadel that I made my way. There I found the king's palace and, entering by a great door of solid gold and lifting a velvet curtain, I saw that all the furniture and everything else there was of fine gold or silver. In the courtyard and in all the rooms soldiers and chamberlains stood or sat, all turned to stone; and in the central hall, filled with chamberlains, lieutenants and wazirs, I saw the king sitting on his throne turned to stone but arrayed in such noble and costly garments as took my breath away. Fifty silk-clad mamelukes holding naked swords stood there in stone about the king. His throne was incrusted with great pearls lying among other jewels. And each pearl shone so like a star that I thought I should lose my wits in gazing on them.

Going on, I reached the harem which I found to be more wonderful than all the rest, being built even to the window-bars of solid gold with silken hangings on the walls; with velvet and satin curtains hanging before the doors and windows. In the midst of a group of women, all turned to stone, I saw the queen herself dressed in a robe sewn with noble pearls, crowned with a mass of great jewels, with collars and necklaces about her throat of pleasantly carved gold; but herself all changed to black stone.

Wandering further, I came to an open door, made with two leaves of virgin silver and beyond it I saw a porphyry staircase of seven steps. Mounting this, I came to a white marble hall covered with a carpet of gold thread in the middle of which there stood, between great golden torches, a dais also of solid gold picked out with emeralds and turquoises. An alabaster bed, studded with pearls and upholstered with precious embroidery, stood on the dais with a great light shining by it. I came near and found that the light proceeded from a diamond, as large as an ostrich egg, lying on a stool by the bed-side and shining from all its facets so that the whole hall was filled with radiance.

Although the diamond outshone them utterly, the torches were lighted; so I deduced that some human hand was near and went on searching among the other halls, marvelling at all I saw and hunting everywhere for a human being. I was so entranced that I forgot all about my voyage, my ship, and my sisters. Night fell suddenly while I was still in a dream at all that beauty; and when I tried to leave the palace I could not find my way. In my search I came again to the hall with the alabaster bed, the diamond, and the lighted torches. Lying down, I half covered myself with a blue satin quilt wrought with silver and pearl and took up a copy of our Koran, that sacred book. It was written out in stately gold characters with red devices and illuminations in all colours. From it I read a few verses to the glory of Allah and to reprove myself that my sleep might be holy. I meditated on the words of the prophet, whom may Allah bless, and tried to sleep.

When the middle of the night had come and I was still awake, I heard a sweet and learned voice reciting the Koran. I rose in haste and, going in the direction of the voice, came to a little room with an open door. I entered softly, leaving the torch which I had caught up outside, and saw that the place was a kind of sanctuary. It was lighted by little green-glass lamps and on its floor, facing the East, lay a prayer-rug where a very beautiful young man was reading the Koran aloud with grave attention and perfect eloquence. In my astonishment I asked myself how this young man alone could have escaped the fate of all the city. I came towards him and wished him peace. When he turned his eyes upon me and wished me peace, I said: "I conjure you by the truth of the sacred sayings which you are reading from the book of Allah to answer my question truly."

Calmly and sweetly he smiled at me, saying: "First, O woman, tell me how it is that you have come into this place where I pray; and then I will answer any question you like to put to me." When he had listened in astonishment to my story, I questioned him concerning the extraordinary appearance of the city. He shut the sacred book and, placing it in a satin bag, bade me sit at his side. I did so and, gazing attentively at him, found in him that full perfection which is in the moon, sympathy, beauty of face, proportioned elegance of body. His cheeks were as clear as crystal, his face had the delicate tint of the fresh date, as if it had been he of whom the poet was thinking when he wrote these lines:

A watcher of the stars at night
Looked up and saw so rose and white
A boy, with such delicious grace,
Such brilliant tint of breast and face,
So curved and delicate of limb,
That he exclaimed on seeing him:
"Sure it was Saturn gave that hair,
A black star falling in the air;
Those roses were a gift from Mars;
The Archer of the seven stars
Gave all his arrows to that eye;

While great sagacious Mercury
Did sweet intelligence impart,
Queen Venus forged his golden heart
And . . . and . . ." But here the sage's art
Stopped short; and his old wits went wild
When the new star drew near and smiled.

Red flames were lighted in my heart when I looked at him and, in the violent trouble of my senses, I regretted that I had not met him long before. "Master and sovereign," I said, "I pray you answer me." "I hear and I obey," he replied, and told me the following remarkable story:

Honourable lady, this was my father's city, filled with his subjects and the people of his kin. He it was whom you saw petrified upon his throne, the queen you saw was my mother. Both were magicians, worshippers of terrible Nardoun, who swore by fire and light, by shade and heat, and all the turning stars.

For a long time my father had no children. I was the child of his age and he raised me carefully throughout my childhood that I might be bred up to the true happiness of kingship.

Now in the palace there was a very old woman who in secret was a Believer in Allah and his Messenger; though in public she pretended to fall in with the creed of my parents. My father had great confidence in her as a faithful and chaste woman; he heaped benefits upon her and firmly believed that she was of his own faith. When I began to grow up, he put me in her charge, commanding her to give me a good education and a grounding in the laws of Nardoun.

The old woman took me into her charge and at once declared to me the religion of Islam from its rites of purification and ablution to the sacred forms of its prayers. She taught and expounded the Koran to me in the Prophet's own tongue and when she had taught me all that she knew, she warned me to keep my knowledge sedulously from my father lest he should kill me. I did so and, when a short time afterwards that saintly old woman died breathing her last words into my ear, I continued a secret believer in Allah and His Prophet. Far different were the inhabitants of this city who hardened their hearts and dwelt in darkness. But one day, while they continued their idolatry, a voice like thunder spoke from an invisible muezzin to far and near, saying: "O people of the city, leave the worship of fire and Nardoun and turn to the one Almighty King."

Terrified by this voice the inhabitants of the city sought the king, my father, and asked the meaning of these awful words. But my father told them not to be frightened or amazed and bade them stand firm in their old beliefs.

So for another year they blindly worshipped fire, until the day came round again on which the voice had been heard. Then the voice boomed out again and this it did on the same day for the next three years. But the people continued to worship their false god until one morning out of the clear sky of dawn, wrath and sorrow fell upon them and they were suddenly turned to black stone, they and their horses, their mules and their camels, and all their beasts. I alone, who was the sole Believer in the city, escaped the doom.

Since then I have remained here, praying, fasting, and reciting from the Book but I have been very lonely, lovely lady, with no one to bear me human company.

On this I said to him: "Youth of every perfection, will you not come with me to the city of Baghdad, where are sages and venerable old men steeped in the teachings of our religion? There your learning and your faith will be increased together and I, though I am a woman of some account, will be your slave there. In Baghdad I am mistress among my people with a following of men, servants and young boys; also I have a ship here full of all necessary goods. Fate threw me upon your coast and Destiny has seen fit to bring us together." I did not cease from fanning his desire to go with me until he consented to do so.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent as was her custom.

But When
The Seventeenth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the girl Zobeida did not cease from fanning the desire of the young man to go with her until he consented to do so.

They talked long together until sleep overcame them and Zobeida slept that night at the feet of the young man. I leave you to imagine whether she was happy or no.

(Zobeida continued her story to the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid in the hearing of Giafar and the three kalendars, in these words):

When morning broke, we chose out from all the treasures of the palace the best we could carry and went down towards the city where we met my slaves and the captain who had been looking for me a long time. They were delighted to see me again and more than a little astonished when I gave them the outline of my story and of the young man's tale concerning the doom which had fallen upon the city. But hardly had my sisters seen the handsome young man when they were filled with violent jealousy and began in their hatred secretly to plot my hurt.

We all went aboard, I in great joy because I loved the youth, and, taking advantage of a favourable wind, sailed away. My sisters never left us alone and one day they asked me directly what I intended to do with the youth. I told them that I meant to marry him and turning towards him, I said: "Master, I desire to become your slave. Do not refuse me this." "Indeed, I do not refuse," he answered and, our troth being thus plighted, I said to my sisters: "This young man is enough property for me. All else I have I give to you." "Your wish is law," they answered, but at the same time they schemed against me in their hearts.

We came with favouring winds from the Dread Sea to the Sea of Safety across which we sailed for several days till we saw the buildings of Bassora rising from the sea. That night we cast anchor and all slept.

While we slept, my sisters rose and, lifting the youth and myself, cast us, mattresses and all, into the sea. The poor young man, who could not swim, was drowned. It was written by Allah that he should become one of the martyrs; just as it was written that I should be saved. For when I fell into the water, Allah sent me a spar of wood to which I clung and supported by which I was carried by the waves to the shore of a near-by island. There I dried my clothes and slept, rising in the morning to look for some track which should lead me to safety. Soon I found a road worn by human feet which I followed into the interior of the island until I had gone right across it and came out on the other side, opposite the city of Bassora. Suddenly I saw a little snake hurrying towards me, hotly pursued by a much larger snake who was trying to kill it. I felt pity for the little snake which was so weary that its tongue hung out. So I lifted a great stone and smashed in the head of the large snake, killing it on the spot. Immediately to my surprise the little snake spread two wings and, flying up into the air disappeared from my sight.

Being broken by fatigue, I lay down where I was and slept for about an hour. When I woke, I found a beautiful young negress seated at my feet, rubbing and kissing them. I snatched them away in considerable shame, not knowing whether her intentions towards me were honourable or not, and asked her sharply who she was and what she wanted. "I hastened to come to you," she said, "because of the great service you have done me in killing my enemy. I am a Jinnia and was in the likeness of that little snake. The big snake was my enemy, a Jinni who wished to rape me and to kill me. You saved me; so I flew at once to the ship from which your two sisters threw you. I changed them into black bitches and have brought them to you." Sure enough, there were two black bitches tied to the tree behind me. "Lastly," went on the Jinnia, "I transported all your riches to your house in Baghdad and then sank the ship. As for your young man, he is drowned. I can do nothing against death. Allah alone is almighty."

With these words she took me in her arms together with my sisters, the bitches, and, flying with us through the air, set us down safely on the terrace of my house here in Baghdad.

Looking about me I found all the treasures and the goods that had been in my ship ranged in careful order about the rooms, not one having been lost or spoiled. Before she left the Jinnia said to me: "I command you by the sacred symbol on the Seal of Sulayman to give each of these bitches three hundred strokes of the whip every day. If you forget even once I shall be obliged to come back and change you also into the same shape."

What could I answer, save: "I hear and I obey"?

Ever since then, O Prince of Believers, I have beaten them and then pitifully caressed them as you have seen. That is my story.

But my sister Amina, my lord, could tell you a stranger tale than mine.

The khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid marvelled exceedingly at this story and then, in the haste of his curiosity, turned to the young Amina, who had opened the door on the previous night, and said: "Now tell me, gracious girl, what caused the marks on your body."

THE TALE OF THE PORTRESS, AMINA

At the words of the khalifat, the young Amina came forward, and said:

Prince of Believers, I will not repeat what our sister Zobeida has told you of our parents; suffice it to say that when they died, I and our little sister Fahima, the youngest of us five, went to live with our mother; while Zobeida and the other two continued to live together.

Soon my mother married me to a rich old man, the most wealthy in all the city at that time, and a year later Allah took my husband to his peace, leaving me with a fortune of eighty thousand dinars in gold.

I made haste to order ten dresses of such splendour that they cost a thousand dinars each and in other ways denied myself nothing.

One day, as I was sitting in comfort, an old woman whom I had never seen before was ushered into my presence. She was in every way hideous. Her face was horrible to look at, her nose was broken, her eyes full of senile lechery, her teeth a wreck. Her neck was thrown like a hen's. The poet made a fair picture of her when he said:

This old foul hag could teach
Things out of the devil's reach;
And without speaking show the devil
All that he did not know of evil.
Suppose a thousand mules were tied
In a soft cobweb's black inside,
She could set free each struggling beast,
Nor break the cobweb in the least.
However lewd and gross an act is
She had it pat by constant practice.
In sin she'd teach a little girl
This lech'rous, wanton, ugly churl.
She laughed at virtue, scorned pure thought;
Lewd vice alone she ever sought.
She cleverly could virtue mime
While plotting quite the blackest crime.
Her black art lit a flame, by God,
In a beldam of a hundred odd.
In fact this horrible old woman
Seemed positively more than human.

She saluted me and said: "Gracious and accomplished dame, I have an orphan girl at home who is going to be married tonight. I have come to ask you—Allah will know how to reward you, dear gracious lady—to honour with your presence the marriage of this poor humble girl, who has no powerful person upon her side, unless it may be Allah." She wept and kissed my feet so that I, who knew nothing of the blackness of her heart, had pity on her and consented. "With your dear gracious permission I will now leave you," she said. "If you will dress now and prepare yourself I will come back for you in the evening." Then she kissed my hand and went away.

I bathed and perfumed myself, chose the fairest of my ten new gowns and, dressing myself in it, put on my noble pearl necklace, my bracelets, my pendants, and all my jewels. I wound my brocaded belt round my waist, threw my large veil of blue silk and gold over my head and, after continuing the direction of my eyes with kohl, put on my little face veil and was ready. Soon the old woman came for me and said: "Mistress, the house is already full of the bridegroom's folk, all the most noble ladies in the city. I have told them that you are coming and they are on the tip-toe of happy expectation." I called some of my slaves to accompany us and we walked till we came to a great well-watered street in which a gentle breeze was playing. Soon we reached a large marble gate, roofed with an alabaster dome, held up by arches, through which we saw a palace going up even to the sky. The old crone knocked and we were admitted into the palace, where we found ourselves in a gaily carpetted and arrassed corridor, its ceiling hung with coloured lamps, its walls lighted by torches and covered with gold and silver trophies, with jewel work and war-like arms. We passed along this corridor and came into a hall furnished with such splendour that it is useless to try to tell you of it. In its midst, all spread about with silk stuffs on the floor, stood a bed of alabaster, crusted with monstrous pearls and jewels of great price, and having a satin quilt thrown over it. Seeing us, a young girl as beautiful as a slip of the moon rose from the bed, saying to me: "Cordial, friendly and easy welcome to you, my sister; you have done us the greatest of all honours. Welcome, welcome; for you are our consolation and our pride." She recited these verses in my honour:

Even the stones of which the house is made
Rejoiced when they had heard that you were coming;
And when you came they bowed and swayed
Behind your steps, and made a pleasant humming,
Stone rubbing against stone with this whisper:
She's here, she's here, she's here, she's here, she's here!

And then sat down, saying: "Sister, I must tell you that I have a brother, a well-made youth and fairer far than I, who saw you one day at a marriage feast and has loved you and fainted for you ever since. It was he who gave money to this old woman to visit you and bring you here by an innocent trick so that he might meet you in all honour in my house. He has no desire but to marry you immediately in this blessed year of Allah and his Prophet; and therefore he has no shame in making an honest proposal."

When I heard her and realised that I was both known and esteemed in this house, I said to the girl: "I hear and I obey!" at which she was filled with great joy and clapped her hands. A door opened at this signal and through it stepped a young man who might have put to shame the moon of Spring. As the poet says:

He is so dear, we might surmise
That every heart
Would surely break apart,
And when he fixed it with his eyes
The broken heart go up in ardencies.

He is so fair, we could aver
That Allah had
Made him, and we could add
That even on such a Jeweller
Such making did a certain fame confer.

As he came and sat down by his sister my heart was drawn towards him; so that I was not grieved at all at the entrance of the kadi with four witnesses, who saluted and sat down. The kadi wrote out my contract with the young man and, when the witnesses had set their seals to the contract, all departed.

The young man came to me, first saying: "May our night be blessed!" and then: "Mistress, I will, if you are agreeable, bind you with a condition." "Speak, my lord," I said, "and tell me what it is." He rose and brought the sacred book to me, saying: "I wish you to swear on the Koran never to choose another than me; never to incline towards another." When to his great contentment I had taken this oath, he threw his arms about my neck and I felt his blood throbbing in all my veins and about the palace of my heart.

Slaves served us with food and drink and, when we had eaten and drunk to satiety and the night had come, he stretched me with him upon the bed and all night long lay in each other's arms.

We lived together for a month in unclouded happiness; and then, one day, I asked my husband's leave to go to the market to buy some fabrics which I needed. He gave me permission, so I dressed and taking with me the old woman went down to the market. I stopped at last before the shop of a young silk merchant whom the old crone had strongly recommended to me for the quality of his goods and because, as she said, she had known him for a long time. As I was examining the wares, she whispered to me: "This is a youth who by his father's death has come into much money"; then turning to the merchant, she said: "Bring out the best and dearest of all your silks, because they are for this beautiful child." "Willingly," he said, and, while he unrolled bale after bale for my inspection, the old woman went on praising him to me and detailing both his beauties and qualities. At last I answered her: "I have nothing to do with his beauties or his qualities. My business is but to buy what I need from him and then go home."

When I offered him the price of the fabric I had chosen, the merchant refused to touch the money, saying: "I am not taking money today; this silk is but a small return for the pleasure and honour you have done my shop." "If he will not accept the money," I exclaimed to the old woman, "give him back the silk!" But he cried out: "As Allah lives, I will take nothing; this is a present. But if, O glorious girl, you care to give me a single kiss in return, I will value it more highly than all the goods in my shop." The old crone rallied him, saying: "Handsome young man, surely you are no great merchant to think a kiss so valuable!" Then to me she continued: "Do you not hear what the young man says, my daughter? Do not worry, there is no harm in a little kiss. Think, you'll be able to choose to your heart's desire among all these pretty stuffs." "Do you not know," I answered sternly, "that I am bound by oath to my lord?" "Let him have one little kiss," she answered, "if you do not speak of it, no one will be hurt and you will be able to carry back your money and all the pretty silks as well." The old woman went on persuading me until I put my head, as it were, in the bag. When I had covered my eyes and stretched my veil behind my head, so that no passer-by should see anything, the young man passed his head under my veil and bringing his mouth to my cheek kissed me. But at the same time, since he loved me and wished to make me his, he bit my cheek so violently that the flesh was broken.

I fainted with pain and when I came to found myself stretched on the knees of the old woman who was mourning over me. The shop was shut up and the young merchant had disappeared. Presently the old woman said; "Praise be to Allah that it is nothing worse! Come, we must get back to the house. When we are there you had better pretend to be ill and I will bring you a salve to heal the bite." I rose and walked as quickly as I could to my husband's house, my terror of him increasing all the way. Arrived there, I went at once to my room and lay down as if I were ill.

It was not long before my husband came in looking very worried and said: "My dear, what evil overtook you while you were out?" "Nothing, I am quite well," I answered. He looked at me closely and said: "But what is that wound on your cheek, in its tenderest part?" "When, with your permission, I went out today," I answered, "a camel piled with firewood crushed against me in the street so that one of the bits of wood tore my veil and wounded me as you see. Oh, the terrible streets of Baghdad!" "Tomorrow," he exclaimed angrily, "I will complain to the governor and he will hang every last one of the camel-men in the city!" Feeling compassion for all these folk, I said: "By Allah, do not charge yourself with so great a sin! The thing was my own fault; I was riding on an ass which ran away and threw me, so that by ill-chance a piece of wood on the ground ran into my cheek." "Tomorrow," my husband cried, "I will go and tell this story to Giafar Al-Barmaki, who will surely kill all the donkey-boys in the city!" "Do you want to kill all the world because of me?" I answered. "It was only an accident, decreed by Allah and allowed by Fate."

But at this excuse my husband could not hold in his fury any longer. "No more lies, you traitress!" he cried, "prepare for punishment!" He stamped on the ground cursing me all the time in a terrible voice and at once a door opened through which seven great negroes ran into the room. They dragged me from my bed, threw me into the middle of the floor and then, by my husband's orders, one held me by the shoulders and sat on my head, a second sat across my knees and held my feet and a third stood over me, sword in hand. Then said my husband: "Cut her in two and bear her up and throw her into the Tigris to be food for fishes. That is the punishment for one who breaks an oath." Further he recited this stanza:

If I had known I nightly deepened
Another's dint in your delightful bed;
"Come out from her, my soul, and cleanly die,
Rather than bear this taint," I would have said.

When he had spoken this stanza my husband called to the negro with the sword: "Come, brave Saad, cut this unfaithful one in two." Saad lifted the blade, but just then my husband bethought him and said to me: "First say your prayers, then run over all your goods and clothes and will them to someone, for your time has come to die." "Yes, give me time for that," I said and lifting my head towards the sky fell to considering the ignominy of my fate until the tears came to my eyes and I wept, intoning this stanza:

Your heart lit mine and now your heart is cold;
You taught me how to wake till night was old;
Now your desire has fallen fast asleep
And all the golden sands of love are told.

You made me swear eternal constancy,
And then with your next heaving of a sigh
You puffed the oath I had not made you take
Down the night wind, to drown in the night sky.

When you have killed me with your foolery
Write on my foolish tomb for all to see:
"This fool was fool enough to fall in love."
And fools of the same sort will pity me.

I wept again, but both my tears and my verses only drove my husband to greater fury so that he countered me with these lines:

My love was not the love of common air;
It only died when I became aware
That your white body was a compromise,
A heaven cut in halves for two to share.

I wept again when he had finished to touch his heart and lessen my punishment, for I hoped that he might spare my life and give me quittance of the price of all my jewels. Gently I recited these lines:

I whose pale shoulders hardly could uplift
The lightest parti-coloured silken shift,
Have to bear up the vessel of distrust
Which your too jealous hand has set adrift.

I feel no wonder that you do me ill,
It is a frightened lover's part to kill;
No, the sole thing at which I am surprised
Is that my dying body loves you still.

Again I wept, but he pushed me violently away from him and cursed me in this wise:

You lay in a strange bed and now give birth
To a new measure. If I mete the earth
With your new measure, surely everything
Will show the record of your guilty mirth.

I'll lie with others while I measure Faith,
I'll measure Constancy in terms of Breath,
I'll take the height of virtue with a Sin
And find the limit of your life in Death.

With this he called again to the negro: "Cut her in two! She is no more to us." The negro advanced but just as I was desperately confiding my lot to Allah, being certain of death, the old woman rushed into the room and threw herself at the feet of my husband, fondling them and saying: "My child, I conjure you on my rights as your nurse to pardon this girl for she has done nothing worthy of death. Besides, you are young, and I fear that her death will be at your door." With repeated tears and prayers she so worked on my husband that he said: "For your sake I will pardon her. But I must mark her for all time." So the negroes stripped me naked and my husband, taking up a pliant quince branch, beat me about the back and breast and flanks so furiously that I fell unconscious at his feet. Thereon, he bade his slaves to leave me as

I was until nightfall and then to take me and throw me down before my own house.

This the slaves did; and when I recovered consciousness it was a long time before I could even crawl into the house. When I managed to do so, I anointed my stripes with various unguents and little by little they healed. But, as you have all seen, I still bear scars as of whips and canes upon my body.

After four months, when I was quite cured, I wished to see the palace where I had suffered such violence; but I found it a ruin and the street in which it was a ruin also. Over all that place of marvels there was nothing to be found save heaps of dung and the refuse of the city; and in spite of all my enquiries I was not able to hear tidings of my husband.

So I sought out my little sister Fahima, who was still a virgin, and we both went to visit Zobeida, our sister who told you the story of the bitches. We exchanged greetings and narratives; and at last Zobeida said: "Dear sister no one in the world is free from trouble; but thanks be to Allah we are all alive. Let us stay together from now on and never let the word marriage be heard between us."

Since then we have lived happily together, little Fahima being our cateress who went down every day into the market to buy what we needed, I looking after the door, and Zobeida ordering all things in the house.

We enjoyed ourselves sufficiently without men until the day on which Fahima brought back the porter with all the things she had bought and we asked him to remain with us a little. After that the three kalendars entered and then you others in the guise of merchants. You know what happened then and how you caused us to be brought before you, Prince of Believers.

Such is my story.

Then the khalifat rejoiced at all the marvels he had heard; so that . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Eighteenth Night
Had Come

Shahrazade continued in this wise:

It is related, O auspicious King, that, on hearing the stories of the girls Zobeida and Amina, who with their little sister Fahima, the two black bitches, and the three kalendars had been brought before him, the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid rejoiced at the marvel of the two tales and ordered them to be written out in fair caligraphy by his scribes.

When the manuscripts had been deposited among the records, the khalifat said to Zobeida: "Now, noble girl, have you no news of the Ifrita who bewitched your two sisters?" "Prince of Believers," answered Zobeida, "I can easily find her; for she gave me a lock of her hair, telling me that if ever I needed her I had but to burn one of the hairs and she would come to me, were it from the other side of Kaf." "Give me that hair," said the khalifat and when she had done so he burnt one thread of it. No sooner had they smelt the smell of burning hair when the palace shook as at a great blow and the Jinnia stood before them in the likeness of a richly-habited young girl. Being a Believer, she said to the khalifat: "Peace be with you, O vicar of Allah!" "Peace light on you!" answered the khalifat, "together with the mercy and blessing of God!" Then said the Ifrita: "This girl, who has just called me at your desire, once rendered me so great a service that I can never repay it. I changed her sisters into bitches, only sparing their lives since their deaths might have caused her too great pain. But I do not forget that I am a Believer; so if you wish it I will free them from their present shapes, for your sake and the sake of their sister." "Indeed, I wish them to be freed," answered the khalifat. "After that we will look into the case of the other young woman and her scars. If her story is true, I will bitterly avenge her on him who acted so unjustly." Then said the Ifrita: "Prince of Believers, I can show you in the twinkling of an eye the man who treated young Amina so, who beat her and deprived her of her goods; for he is very near us as we stand here." First she took a glass of water and, speaking magic words over it, sprinkled the bitches until they turned again to young girls, so beautiful that He who made them should be glorified therefore; and then she turned to the khalifat, saying: "The husband of young Amina is your own son, El-Amin."

When the khalifat heard the second story confirmed and that by no human lips, he called his son to him and asked for an explanation. El-Amin told the story from his point of view and the khalifat ordered kadis and witnesses to be brought into the hall.

Then El-Amin was re-married to the young Amina, Zobeida to the first kalendar who was a King's son, the other two sisters to the the other two kalendars, princes both; and the khalifat himself was married to the youngest of the five sisters, the maiden Fahima, the witty and agreeable cateress.

Haroun Al-Rachid had a palace built for each couple and endowed them with riches that they might live happily. Also, hardly had night fallen, when he himself hastened to bed with the young Fahima and they passed the sweetest of nights together.

But, continued Shahrazade to King Shahryar, do not believe, my sovereign, that this story is in any way more astonishing than the one I am about to tell you.

THE TALE OF THE WOMAN CUT IN PIECES, THE THREE APPLES & THE NEGRO RIHAN

Shahrazade said:

One night the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid said to Giafar Al-Barmaki: "I wish us to go down into the city tonight to inform ourselves of the acts of the governors and the walis. Those against whom I hear complaint I shall most certainly remove from office." Giafar answered: "I hear and I obey."

So the khalifat, Giafar, and Massrur, the sword-bearer, disguised themselves and went down to wander through the streets of Baghdad. In a byway they saw a very old man, carrying a net and creel on his head and a stick in his hand. He was going along very slowly, murmuring these lines:

They said:
Your cultured head
Shines on the black
Of learning's lack
In other men.

Pray cease,
(I answered then)
My girth's increase
And daily peace
Would be maintained
More by the earning
Of an harlot's hour,
Than by the power
Of all my learning.

My books and ink,
With all I know and think,
In this world's mart
Would kick the beam
Against a salted bream
And a stale tart.

Learning may have some worth
Beneath the earth,
So I will roam
Till I have found
The single home
We beggars have,
A shallow grave
Below the ground.

The khalifat, after listening to these lines, said to Giafar: "Both the song and the appearance of this poor man would seem to indicate most grievous misery." Then going up to the old man he said: "Father, what is your trade?" "Master, I am a fisherman," the other answered, "also I am very old and have a large family. From noon until now I have laboured beyond my strength and yet Allah has not seen good to provide me with even a morsel of bread for my children. I am tired of myself and tired of life, and death is all I wish for." Then said the khalifat: "Can you come back with us to the riverside and cast your net once more into the Tigris on my behalf, that I may try my luck? I will buy the catch of that casting for a hundred dinars."

The old man joyfully accompanied them back to the Tigris and, casting his net, brought it to shore in a few moments with a heavy locked chest inside it. Having hefted it and found it of a great weight, the khalifat gave the hundred dinars to the fisherman who went on his way rejoicing, while Giafar and Massrur lifted the chest and carried it to the palace. The khalifat lit torches while Giafar and Massrur broke open the chest. Inside was a large basket of palm leaves, sewn with a red cord. This cord they cut and found in the basket, first a carpet, then a woman's white veil, and last the woman herself, as pale as virgin silver, murdered and cut in pieces.

The khalifat wept at this sight and then turned in a fury to Giafar, shouting: "Dog of a wazir! This is how men go murdering and drowning about my city, and the blood they shed will lie heavy against me on the judgment day. By Allah, I will not be equal with this murderer until I have slain him. As for you, Giafar, I swear by my descent from the children of Abbas that unless you bring me the man who has killed this woman I will crucify you on my palace door and forty of your relatives, the Barmacides, to keep you company." Thus the khalifat exploded in wrath, but when Giafar begged for a delay of three days he granted it to him.

Poor Giafar wandered about the city in great grief, saying to himself: "How, in God's name, can I find the murderer and bring him to the khalifat? And if I bring another to die instead of him it will lie heavy on my conscience. I am in a very sad dilemma." So saying, he went up to his house and stayed there for three days in a lethargy of despair. On the fourth day he appeared before the khalifat, who asked him for the murderer. "Can I see the invisible or search out the hidden?" answered Giafar. "Can I find an unknown assassin in a whole city-full of people?" Furious at this answer, the khalifat ordered Giafar to be crucified on the gate of the palace and commanded the public crier to make this proclamation throughout the city:

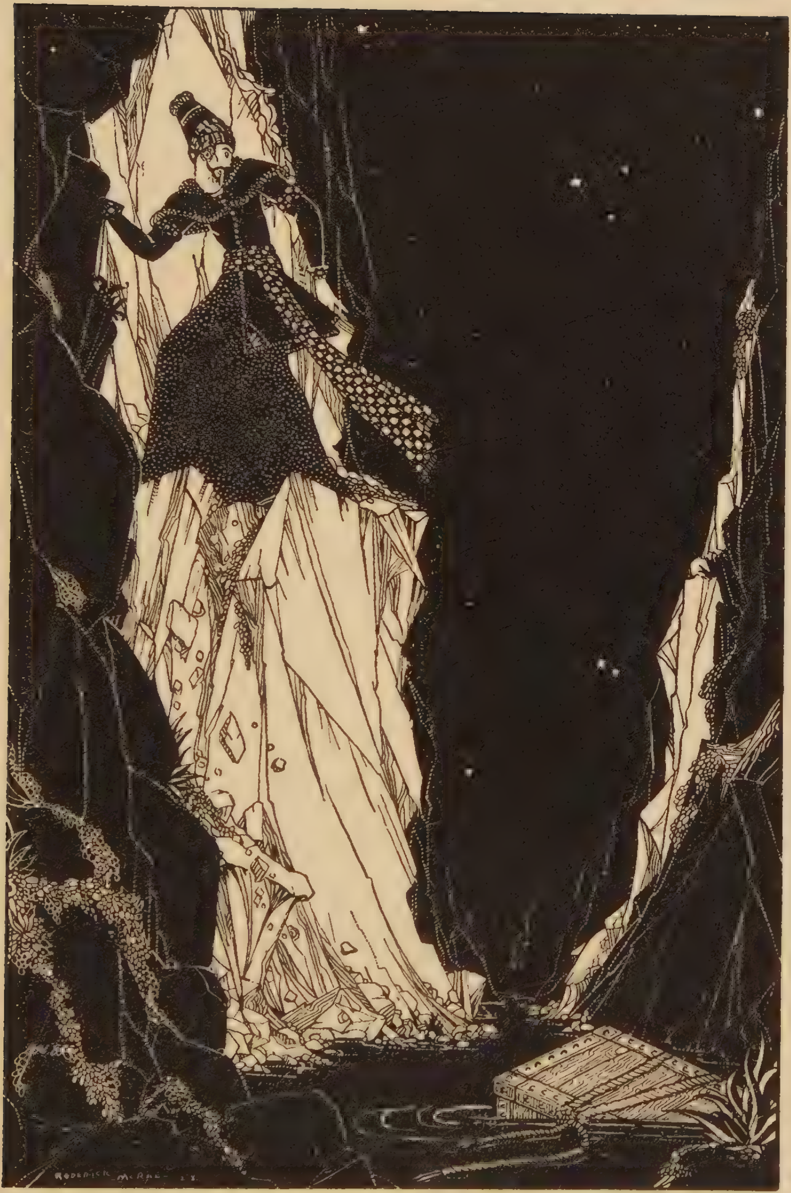
"All who desire to see Giafar Al-Barmaki, wazir of the khalifat, crucified upon the palace gate, and forty Barmacides crucified upon the palace gate, are cordially invited to attend the spectacle."

All the people of Baghdad flocked from every quarter to see the crucifixion of Giafar and his cousins, not knowing the reason for it and weeping and wailing because both Giafar and all the Barmacides were loved for their kindness and generosity.

When the platforms had been erected for the execution and the captains were only waiting for the word of the khalifat, suddenly a richly dressed and very beautiful young man burst through the weeping crowd and threw himself at Giafar's feet, crying: "Master and greatest of great lords, O sanctuary of the poor, I come to deliver you! It was I who killed the woman and hid her remains in the chest which you recovered from the Tigris. Kill me now, that she may be avenged!"

When Giafar heard the young man's words he grieved for him, though he could not help rejoicing for himself. He was on the point of asking for details when an old man also made his way through the crowd and hurrying up saluted Giafar and the young man with these words:

"Do not believe what this youth has said, O wazir, for I alone am the slayer of the young woman. I alone should pay the penalty!" "O wazir," broke in the other, "this old man is in his dotage. He does not know what he says. I alone killed her and must pay the penalty." To this the old man replied: "My child, you are young and life is sweet to you; I am old and have quite finished with the world. Gladly will I act as ransom for you, the wazir, and his cousins. I repeat that I did the murder and should be punished for it."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"The Woman Cut in Pieces"

Greatly perplexed by these two self-accusers, Giafar obtained leave from the chief of the guard and hurried them both into the presence of the khalifat. When he stood before him he said: "Prince of Believers, here is the murderer of the young woman!" and when the khalifat asked which was the murderer, he said: "This young man says that he is; but the old man denies it and says that he himself did the deed." Looking at both of them, the khalifat asked: "Which of you killed the woman?" "I did!" they both answered, so the khalifat said to Giafar: "Crucify them both!" "But if only one of them did the thing, to kill the other would be a great injustice," said Giafar. At this the young man burst out: "I swear by Him Who has stretched out the skies like curtains and laid out the earth below them like a garden, that I alone did the thing. I can prove it to you." Then he described all the circumstances of the packing away of the body which were only known to the khalifat, Giafar, and Massrur; so that the khalifat, being convinced of his guilt, asked in astonishment: "Why did you do it? Why, having done it, do you confess it without having been beaten about the feet for that end? And why do you come here begging for punishment?" So the young man told this story:

Prince of Believers, that young woman was my wife, daughter of this good old man. She came to me young and clean and Allah blessed us with three men children. She loved me and waited on me in all docility and I, for my part, saw nothing of evil in her.

At the beginning of this month she fell sick; but I called in learned doctors and eventually, with the help of Allah, they cured her. I had not lain with her since the beginning of her illness, and wishing to do so again, suggested that she should go to bathe at the hammam. But she told me that she had a certain queasy longing to bite and smell an apple before she went to the bath. At once I went down into the city to buy her an apple, whatever might be the cost of one. But not one of the fruiterers had such a thing, so I was forced to return empty handed. Not wishing to see my wife in her disappointment, I studied all night how I might come by the fruit and at dawn made my way to the market gardens, visiting them one by one, and tree by tree. At last I met an old gardener who said: "My child, an apple is a very difficult thing to come by for the simple reason that there are none in these parts, save in the orchard of the Commander of the Faithful at Bassora. But even there you will not find it easy to lay hands on one, because they are kept strictly for the khalifat."

I returned home and told my wife what I heard. Then, as my love for her was very great, I set out for Bassora, taking fifteen days on the journey there and back. Luck favoured me and I returned to her with three apples which I had managed to buy at a dinar each from the keeper of the orchard at Bassora.

Joyfully I went in to my wife and gave her the three apples. But she did not appear delighted at the sight of them and simply laid them carelessly by her side. From this and other signs I saw that the fever had very violently come back to her while I was away. For ten days she was so ill that I never left her side for a moment; but after that, thanks be to Allah, she became better again, so that I was able to leave her and return to my shop.

Towards noon, while I was sitting in my shop, a negro passed who was throwing an apple from hand to hand. "Friend," I called to him, "tell me where you got that apple. I should like to buy some." At this he laughed and said: "I got it from my wench. I went to see her today and found that she had been ill for some time. Three apples were lying by her side and when I asked her about them she said: 'Just imagine, my dear, my poor cukold of a husband went all the way to Bassora and bought them for three golden dinars!' Then she gave me this apple." Prince of Believers, the world turned black about me when I heard what the negro said: I shut my shop and went raving through the streets until I came to my house. I looked at the bed and seeing that the third apple had gone I asked my wife where it was. She said that she did not know; thus proving to my mind the negro's story. I leapt upon her, knife in hand, and kneeling on her belly hacked her in pieces. Then hastily I put her into the basket, covering the top with the veil and the carpet and enclosing the basket in the chest, loaded the chest on my mule and later, with my own hands, threw it into the Tigris.

Hasten my death, O Commander of the Faithful; for unless I expiate now, I have fears for the day of Resurrection.

So I threw her into the Tigris and returned to my house without any having seen me. There I found my eldest little son in tears and, being certain that he knew nothing of his mother's death, I asked him why he wept. He answered: "Because I took ono of mother's apples and ran into the street to play with my brothers. A big negro came by and snatched the apple from my hand, asking where I had got it. I told him that father had gone to Bassora and bought it with two others for three gold pieces; but even then he would not give it back. He beat me and went off with it. Now I am afraid that mother will beat me for taking the apple."

When the child said this I knew that the negro had told base lies about my wife and that I had killed her for no reason. My father-in-law and I sat side by side and wept till midnight. For five days we kept up the observance of grief, wailing and lamenting even up to today.

Prince of Believers, I conjure you by the sacred memory of your ancestors to hasten my death that I may expiate this foul murder!

The khalifat was astonished at this story and cried out; "As Allah lives, I will slay none except this wicked negro!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Nineteenth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that when the khalifat, seeing that there was much excuse for the young man, swore that he would only kill the negro, he turned to Giafar, saying: "Bring me that wretched black who was the cause of all this tragedy. If you cannot find him, you shall die in his place."

Giafar went out weeping and exclaiming: "How can I bring him the negro? My first escape was as lucky as if a jug having once fallen should not break. Now there is no hope for me save in Allah. I shall not waste the three days that are left to me in vain searchings but abide in my house the wishes of the Most High."

So he went up to his house and stayed there for three days. On the fourth, hearing that the khalifat was still minded to slay him if he could not produce the negro, he sent for the kadi, and having made his will, bade a tearful farewell to all his children. As he was embracing the smallest of his daughters for the last time, straining her against his breast and weeping, he felt some round thing in her pocket and asked her what it was. "It is an apple, father," she answered, "which our negro, Rihan, sold me four days ago for two dinars."

Hearing the words negro and apple Giafar gave a great cry of joy and sent straightway for Rihan. On being questioned about the apple, the slave replied: "Five days ago, master, as I was walking through the city I saw some children playing in a bye street and one of them had this apple in his hand. I took it away from him and beat him; on which he burst out crying and told me that it had been bought with two others for three dinars at Bassora by his father for his mother who was ill and had a longing for the fruit. I took no notice of his tears, but brought the apple here and sold it to my little mistress for two dinars."

Giafar was exceedingly concerned when he saw how all these troubles had come about through the folly of his own slave. He ordered Rihan to be put under arrest and himself made haste to the palace, rejoicing at his narrow escape from death and reciting these lines to himself:

If your slave gets you into trouble,
Then scruple not to have him slain;
A pair of slaves can double and re-double,
But your lost soul can never come again.

Arrived at the palace, he told the whole story to the khalifat, who was so astonished at all the circumstances of it that he ordered it to be written out and placed among the annals to be a lesson for the men of all time.

But Giafar said: "There is no need to be too astonished at this tale, Commander of the Faithful; it is far from equalling that of the wazir Nureddin, and his brother Shamseddin."

"What tale is that?" said the khalifat, and Giafar answered: "Prince of Believers, I will not tell it to you unless you pardon my slave, Rihan, for his foolish act." "Be it so," answered the khalifat. "I spare his life on condition that you tell me the tale."

THE TALE OF THE WAZIR NUREDDIN, HIS BROTHER THE WAZIR SHAMSEDDIN, AND HASSAN BADREDDIN

Said Giafar Al-Barmaki:

Know, O Commander of the Faithful, that there was once a just and benevolent sultan in the land of Egypt who had a learned wazir, skilled in sciences and letters. This wazir was a very old man but he had two sons as fair as twin moons, called Shamseddin and Nureddin. Though Shamseddin the elder had been exceptionally gifted with beauty and character; the younger, Nureddin, exceeded his brother in every way and had not his equal in the whole earth. Many persons journeyed to Egypt at that time from far countries solely for the pleasure of feasting their eyes on the beauty of Nureddin.

When in the fullness of time his wazir died, the sultan who had dearly loved him called the two sons and presented each with a robe of honour, saying; "From now you shall occupy your father's position at my court." The brothers humbled themselves before the sultan in thanks and, after they had prolonged the funeral rights of their father for a month, jointly took over the duties of wazir; acting week and week about, and he who was wazir at the time accompanying the sultan on any journeys he might make.

On the night before one such journey of the sultan, in which it was Shamseddin's turn to accompany him, the brothers were passing the evening in conversation. In the course of their talk the elder said: "It seems to me that we should marry; and do so on the same night." "Be it as you say, brother," answered Nureddin. When this first point had been agreed between them, Shamseddin said again. "When we have lain with our wives on the same night and they, if Allah allows, have given birth on the same day, mine to a girl, yours to a boy; then we should marry the children to each other." "And what dowry would you expect my son to give your daughter?" asked Nureddin. "I think I should ask three thousand golden dinars and three of the best farms and villages in Egypt," answered Shamseddin. "That will not be much for a daughter of mine, and if your son is not willing to give it the matter need not go on." "Do not believe it!" exclaimed Nureddin. "What is all this talk of a dowry? We are brothers and wazirs; you should be only too pleased to let my son have your daughter for nothing: a boy is of infinitely more worth than a girl. You talk like a merchant doubling and then re-doubling the price of butter because he does not want to sell." Said Shamseddin: "You seem to think that your son is nobler than my daughter. It just proves my contention that you are absolutely lacking in both good sense and gratitude. You talk of our wazirship; do you not realise that you owe your high estate to me, because I pitied you and wished someone to help me in the work? You can say what you like now; your son shall never marry my daughter even if he bring with him his weight in gold!" Nureddin became very angry at this and cried: "Indeed your daughter shall never have my son!" "There is no need for more," said Shamseddin. "As I have to set out tomorrow with the sultan I cannot make you feel just yet how ill-considered your words have been; but when I come back, as Allah lives, you shall see what you shall see!"

Nureddin straightway left his brother and went home to sleep, a prey to consuming anger and grief.

Next morning after the sultan and Shamseddin had set out along the banks of the Nile, intending to cross over by boat to Ghizah and continue thence as far as the Pyramids, Nureddin rose in a very bad humour. When he had washed and prayed he went to his storerooms and filled a saddle-bag with gold, thinking all the time of his brother's harsh words and his own humiliation. He recalled these stanzas:

Go out from the city;
There are friends and life
In being under black tents.

Let your soul
Take root in the brown earth
And make your friends of strangers.

Is not water rotten
Until it wanders?

Is the moon remarkable
Until it wanes?

What virtue has a lion in the wood;
Or an arrow
Hiding against the bow?

What is gold in the rock;
Or aloe-wood in the tree?

Go out from the city;
There are friends and life
In being under black tents.

Recalling these lines he ordered one of his young slaves to saddle his dapple grey mule, the swiftest and the fairest that he had. The slave put a gold-brocaded saddle on her with Indian stirrups and a saddle-cloth of Ispahan gold, tending her so carefully that she seemed like a bride clothed for her wedding. Nureddin had a great silk carpet and a little prayer rug spread on her and between them he fastened the saddle-bag filled with gold.

"I am going to ride beyond the city," he said to his slaves, "as far as Kalyub, where I shall lie for three nights in hope of curing an oppression of the chest with the fine air there. I forbid anyone to follow me."

He took provisions for his journey and rode away on the mule. Once quit of Cairo he galloped so well that he reached Bilbays by noon. Here he dismounted to rest himself and his animal and after eating went into the city and bought all of which he had a need. Two days afterwards at noon he arrived at the sacred city of Jerusalem where, having eased his mule and eaten, he lay down on the silken carpet with his head on the saddle-bag and slept. But his dreams were still troubled with anger against his brother. At dawn the next morning he was in the saddle and did not slacken speed until he came to Aleppo, where he stayed in one of the khans for three days, enjoying the healthy air of the place. On the third day, after having bought some of those excellent sweets which they know so well how to make at Aleppo and which had been favourites with him since childhood—the kind which are stuffed with pistachios and almonds and have a sugar crust—he mounted and again took the road.

Once outside Aleppo he let the mule have her head as he was no longer certain of the country. She carried him night and day until on a certain sunset he reached the city of Bassora, though he did not know what its name was until he had put up at the nearest khan. When he had dismounted all his belongings from the mule he commanded the stable-boy of the khan to lead her up and down the street a little, so that she should not catch cold by stopping work too suddenly. He himself sat down on his carpet in the khan to rest.

While the stable-boy was leading the mule up and down it chanced that the wazir of Bassora was looking out on the street from one of the windows of his palace. Seeing so fine an animal so richly caparisoned he thought that it must belong to some wazir or even some king. So he sent one of his slaves to fetch the stable-boy to him. The wazir, who was a very old and honourable man, asked the stable-boy when he came, who and of what rank the master of the mule might be. ''My lord,'' said the stable-boy, ''he is a very beautiful young man, a true heart-breaker, richly dressed like some great merchant's son. His face inspires both trust and admiration."

The wazir hearing this mounted one of his horses and rode to the khan. When Nureddin saw him coming he rose and running to meet him helped him from his horse. They greeted each other cordially and the wazir, sitting down by Nureddin's side, asked him whence and why he had come to Bassora. "I come from Cairo where I was born," answered Nureddin. "My father was wazir to the sultan of Egypt, but now Allah has had mercy on him and he is dead." Continuing, the young man told the wazir all his tale and added: "I am determined never to return to Egypt until I have visited every city of every country in the world."

"My child," said the wazir gravely, "such a determination can come to no good. Continuous travel through strange countries leads to ruin and the end of everything. Take my advice in this, dear lad, for I am fearful of what life and time may have in store for you."

The wazir then ordered his slaves to bring the mule and all Nureddin's other belongings to his own house where he provided the strange young man with a room and all else he might require.

Nureddin stayed some time with the wazir who gave him audience every day, heaped favours upon him, and ended by loving him dearly. "My child," he said to him one day, "I am an old man and I have no son; but Allah has given me one daughter who is both as beautiful and as excellent in all her ways as you are. So far I have refused all offers for her hand, but I have grown so to love you that if you consent I will make her your wife and your slave. Also, if you marry her, I will go to the sultan and tell him that you are my nephew newly come out of Egypt to Bassora in order to ask my daughter in marriage. For my sake the sultan will make you wazir instead of me. I am very old and need rest. It will be a great joy to me when I can go up into my house and never leave it again."

Nureddin sat silent for a little with lowered eyes and then said: "I hear and I obey!" The wazir was overjoyed at this consent and ordered all his slaves to prepare a feast, lighting and decorating his greatest hall which was reserved for the entertaining of the most important emirs.

When all his friends had come at his invitation, and among them the greatest personages and merchants of Bassora, the wazir explained the choice which he had made of Nureddin, saying: "I have a brother who was wazir in the court of Egypt to whom Allah gave two sons. Before he died he begged me to marry my daughter to one of them and I promised to do so. This young man is one of my nephews and has come here that I may fulfil my promise by him. I desire to have his marriage contract drawn up for him to come to live with me."

All were in cordial agreement with this plan and sat down in great good humour to drink every kind of wine and eat prodigious quantities of sweets and pastries. Later, when they had been sprinkled with ceremonial rose-water, they took their leave.

After they had gone, the wazir ordered his boy slaves to take Nureddin to the hammam and give him a luxurious ritual bath. He himself provided a beautiful robe of his own, towels, copper basins, perfume braziers and all else that he might need. When he had bathed, Nureddin put on the new robe and rode back through the streets of the city as the full moon rides through the fairest of the nights of summer. He spurred his dapple mule towards the wazir's palace and all the people in the streets cried out on Allah in praise of the fair young man whom He had made. When he had dismounted and entered the palace he kissed the wazir's hand and . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Twentieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that the wazir rose and joyfully embraced Nureddin, saying: "Now, my son, go up to your wife and be happy. Tomorrow I will take you to the sultan. For tonight Allah has so filled this old heart with joy that I have no more to ask of Him."

Kissing his father-in-law's hand a second time, Nureddin went up to the chamber of his bride and there we may safely leave him.

As for his brother Shamseddin at Cairo . . . when he had returned from his journey to the Pyramids with the Sultan of Egypt he was disturbed at not finding his brother Nureddin. The slaves of whom he asked news could only say that on the morning of the Sultan's setting forth he had had his mule magnificently equipped, saying that he intended to go to Kalyub to cure himself there of an oppression of the chest, and forbidding anyone to follow him. "Since that day,'' they added, ''we have had no further news of him.''

Then Shamseddin began to mourn bitterly because of his brother's absence, becoming each day more certain in his mind that it must have been his own harsh words on the eve of the sultan's setting forth which had caused him to flee the city. ''If I can only find him,'' he thought, ''I will handsomely repair my ill-treatment of him.''

So Shamseddin went to the Sultan who, when he had heard the whole tale, wrote dispatches over his own seal to the effect that Nureddin had disappeared and must be found, which he sent by swift horsemen to all his viceroys in other countries.

But all the couriers returned without news, for not one of them had been to Bassora. ''It is all my fault,'' wept Shamseddin, ''nothing of the sort would have happened if I had shown a little tact and understanding!''

But everything has an end; and at last Shamseddin forgot his grief and married the daughter of one of the greatest merchants in Cairo. That which happened between them happened!

Now it so chanced that it was on the same night that both the brothers, one in Cairo and one in Bassora, lay with their wives for the first time. Allah allowed it, that it might be shown that He is the master of His creatures' destinies.

Just as the brothers had agreed before their quarrel, their wives not only conceived on the same night but brought forth on the same day: to Shamseddin, wazir of Egypt, a daughter more beautiful than any in all the land and to Nureddin, at Bassora, a son whose beauty had no peer among any who were alive upon the earth at that time. The poet has said:

Drink at his mouth,
Forgetting the full red cups and reeling bowls.

Drink at his eyes,
Forgetting the purple scent of the vine.

Drink at his cheeks,
Forgetting the life of roses poured in crystal.

Drink at his heart,
Forgetting everything.

Because of his beauty Nureddin's son was named Hassan Badreddin, the beauty of faith's moon. His birth was the occasion of great public rejoicing and, on the seventh day after his coming into the world, banquets were given in his honour on a royal scale, as if he had been a little prince. When all the feasting was over Nureddin was conducted by the wazir of Bassora into the presence of the sultan and, as he was a man of great eloquence, learned of the beauties in poetry, he recited, as he kissed the earth between the sultan's hands, these impromptu lines:

Each thing he does is a new pearl to bless
The holy throat of his bride, Righteousness;
And if my lips adventure to his hand
They kiss the five white keys of happiness.

Ravished by this well-turned compliment, the sultan graciously received Nureddin, though he did not know who he was; and after he had praised his literary skill asked the wazir who this eloquent young man might be.

The wazir told him the whole story from beginning to end; and the sultan asked: "How is it that I have never heard you speak of your nephew?" "Sovereign and over-lord,'' answered the wazir, ''I had a brother who was wazir in the court of Egypt. He died leaving two sons, the elder of whom succeeded to his wazirship, while the younger came to visit me in furtherance of a promise which I had made to his father that I would marry one of my nephews to my daughter. I married him to my dear child as soon as he arrived in Bassora. He is a young man, as you see, and I am old, a little deaf, and inattentive to the business of the state. I come to beg my lord to name this nephew and son-in-law of mine as my successor. I can assure you that he is in every way fit to be your wazir. He is a man of excellent counsel, fertile in expedient ideas, and well versed in the business of government.'' Before replying the sultan looked long and closely at young Nureddin and, finding all about him as it should be, fell in with the aged wazir's plan and named Nureddin grand wizar on the spot. He gave him a robe of honour wrought by a thousand cunning needles, a mule from his own stables, and appointed guards and chamberlains to be ever about him.

Nureddin kissed the sultan's hand and left the presence with his father-in-law. They went home rejoicing and hastened at once to kiss the week-old Hassan Badreddin, saying: ''The little one has brought good fortune with him.''

Next day Nureddin went up to the palace to take over his new duties and, when he had greeted the sultan, said:

Silence were meet, and yet I cry aloud
In my great sovereign's praise:
Your days are whiter than a morning cloud,
And all your nights are days.

With the sultan's permission Nureddin then sat down on the diwan of the wazirs and began to deal with the current affairs of the city, doing justice as if he had been a wazir for many years and in all acquitting himself so well beneath the eyes of the sultan that the other marvelled at his intelligence, his business understanding, and his admirable justice.

The sultan loved him more and more and admitted him to his closest friendship. But, while he continued to fulfil his difficult duties in the most approved fashion, Nureddin did not for a moment neglect the upbringing of his son, Hassan Badreddin. At the same time he became more powerful and more in favour every day, so that the sultan increased the number of his chamberlains, slaves, guards, and couriers. Soon Nureddin became so rich that he was able to traffic on the grand scale: to fit out argosies, to build great houses, to set up mills and water wheels, to plant mighty gardens and orchards.

When Hassan Badreddin was four years old, the aged wazir died and Nureddin gave him a great and solemn funeral at which all the chief men of the land attended.

After this Nureddin devoted himself with single purpose to the religious and artistic education of his son. He caused a venerable sage to come each day to teach young Hassan Badreddin in his own home; and this old man little by little initiated him into the teaching of the Koran until he could say the whole of it by heart and after, year by year, grounded him in all branches of secular knowledge. Hassan grew up in beauty and in all accomplishments. In the words of the poet:

He is a moon to whom the sun bequeaths
Light for his cheek's scarlet anemone sheaths;
He is a king who has beneath his power
All the warm meadows and each coloured flower.

During all this time young Hassan never left his father's house for an instant because his old tutor demanded every moment of his time for lessons. But when he reached his fifteenth year and had nothing more to learn from the old man, his father Nureddin put on him the most magnificent of all his robes and setting him on his finest mule went forth with him to visit the sultan. All the people in the streets of Bassora cried out at the sight of young Hassan Badreddin, commenting on the beauty of his face and of his body, the rarity of his manner and of his carriage, and exclaiming: "Ya Allah! how beautiful! A moon! Allah preserve him!"

As for the sultan when he saw Badreddin he lost his breath and could not regain it for a whole minute. He bade him approach and, falling in love with him at first sight, made him his favourite, showered gifts upon him and said to his father Nureddin: "Dear wazir, bring him to me every day, for I cannot live without him." So Nureddin was forced to answer: "I hear and I obey!"

About the time that Hassan Badreddin became firmly established as the friend and favourite of the sultan, Nureddin fell seriously ill and, knowing that the time was not long before he would be called to Allah, sent for Hassan and said to him: "My child, this world is as it were a house falling about our ears, but the world to come will prove an eternal abiding place. Before I die I have certain precepts to give you to which I require you to open both your ears and your heart." Then Nureddin gave Hassan rules of inestimable value for his conduct among his equals and for every occasion in life.

After he had done so, Nureddin fell silent and began to think of his brother Shamseddin wazir of Egypt, his native land, the people of his house and all his friends in Cairo; until he wept because he would never see them more. Then he said to Hassan: "My boy, remember the words that I am going to say to you, because they are very important. I have a brother, Shamseddin, who is wazir of Cairo in Egypt. I left your uncle after an unimportant quarrel and came here to Bassora. Now I would dictate my last instructions to you. Take paper and reed and write as I say."

Choosing a sheet of paper, Hassan Badreddin opened the pen-case which hung at his belt, chose the finest of his reed pens, and plunged it in the ink-soaked oakum which lay in the middle of the case. He sat down, folded the paper over his right hand, and taking the pen in his left, said: "Father, I am waiting for your words." Nureddin began to dictate: "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate . . ." and went on until he had told all his story from beginning to end. He gave the date of his arrival at Bassora, of his marriage with the wazir's daughter; he set down all his genealogy with the name of his forbears both direct and indirect, together with the origin of each, the rank that each had acquired; and all the tree of his family both on his father's and his mother's side. When all was finished, he said: "Keep this writing safely and if ever evil befall you return to the land of your fathers; even to Cairo the fair city of your father Nureddin; seek out your uncle the wazir and tell him that I died grieving in a strange land that I might not look upon his face again. Forget not, my son Hassan, either this paper or the counsels I have given you.''

Hassan carefully folded the paper after sanding it and sealing it with his father's seal. Then he enclosed it in waxed cloth to keep it from the damp and sewed it between the sash and bonnet of his turban.

This done he had no other thought but to kiss his father's hand and weep over him; while Nureddin whispered counsels in his ear until his soul took flight.

This death cast not only Hassan Badreddin down into the mire of grief, but the sultan also, with all the emirs of that land both great and small.

They buried Nureddin according to his rank and Hassan mourned for him for two months with such real grief that he even forgot to go up to the palace to see the sultan as had been his custom.

The sultan, not understanding that it was grief alone which kept the beautiful boy from him, but thinking that Hassan avoided him deliberately, became very angry, named another in the place of Nureddin which he had sworn that Hassan should have, and took another young chamberlain under his protection.

He did more. He ordered all Hassan's goods, his houses, and everything that his father had left him to be sealed up and confiscated, and commanded the boy himself to be brought before him in chains. The new wazir took some of the chamberlains with him and set out for Hassan's house where the lad sat, not dreaming of the misfortune so soon to come upon him.

Now among the slaves of the palace there was a certain young mameluke who loved Hassan Badreddin. Hearing what was about to happen, he ran at top speed and told everything to the grieving youth. ''Is there time for me to get some money?'' asked

Hassan. "Time presses," answered the mameluke, "go now if you would save your life!"

So Hassan rushed out, dressed as he was and empty-handed, with his robe lifted over his head so that he should not be recognised, and hurried towards the outskirts of the city.

All about him the people of Bassora who had heard of the evil intentions of the sultan were crying: "Allah have mercy on his beauty!" Hassan heard them, but he hastened on till chance led him to his father's tomb. He lifted his robe from about his face and went in under the dome of the sepulchre to pass the night there.

While he was seated in bitter reflection, a certain Jew, a well-known merchant in Bassora, passed by on his return to the city from a neighbouring village. He recognised Hassan at once and approached him respectfully, saying: "Indeed, my lord, your beautiful face is changed. Has some new misfortune befallen you since the death of your father, whom I loved? May Allah have mercy on his soul!" Not wishing to tell him the whole truth, Hassan answered: "While I was asleep at home this afternoon my father's spirit came to me and reproached me for not having visited his tomb. I jumped up as I was and ran here in a state of terror and regret. I have not yet recovered my proper looks."

"My lord," said the Jew, "for a long time I have meant to come to speak to you on a matter of business; now that chance has brought us together I will tell you what I have in my mind. I used to do business with your father and know that there are still many ships on the sea bearing back merchandise for him. If you are willing, I will buy one of their cargoes for a thousand dinars and pay you on the spot."

Hassan could not but accept this offer in which he saw the hand of Allah; so the Jew counted out a thousand dinars from his purse and gave them to the young man asking for a sealed receipt. Hassan took the paper which the Jew offered him, dipped his reed in the other's copper writing case, and wrote as follows:

"I, Hassan Badreddin, son of the wazir Nureddin (who is dead and may Allah have mercy on his soul) have sold to the Jew so-and-so, son of such-an-such, merchant of Bassora, the cargo of the first of my father's boats to reach the city, for the sum of one thousand dinars only."

He sealed the paper with his father's seal and gave it to the Jew, who left him with many expressions of respect.

Hassan sat there mourning and weeping until nightfall when sleep overtook him on his father's grave and he lay as one dead until the rising of the moon. Then, his head having rolled off the stone, he was obliged to turn over and lie out on his back, full in the moonlight in all his beauty.

Now that burial-ground was the resort of benevolent Jinn, Mussulmans and Believers. By chance a charming Jinnia was taking the air at that time under the moonlight, and happening to pass by the sleeping Hassan she halted on seeing his surpassing beauty. "As Allah lives," she exclaimed, "here is indeed a lovely boy! I feel that I could fall in love with his eyes if they were open; they must be very black and fine. I think I will fly about a little until he wakes and then come back." So saying she flew off and mounted very high to find the fresh air. In the course of her circling she was delighted to meet a friend, a Jinni who was also a Believer. She greeted him sweetly and he returned her salutations in proper form. "Where have you come from?" she asked. "From Cairo," he answered. "How do all the good believers in Cairo?" she questioned, and he replied: "Thanks be to Allah, they do very well." Then said she: "Would you like to come with me to look on the beauty of a young man who is lying asleep in the burial ground of Bassora?" "Certainly," said the Jinni; so they took hands and, swooping down, alighted before the young Hassan. "Was I not right?" asked the Jinnia, winking, and the Jinni answered: "Allah, Allah! There is not his like anywhere! Many a lovely woman shall, as it were, explode because of him. And yet," he went on, "now that I come to think of it, my sister, I have seen one with whom this pretty youth might be compared, the daughter of the wazir Shamseddin of Cairo." "I do not know her," said the Jinnia. "Listen, then," said the Jinni, " and I will tell you all about her." And he told the following tale:

Her father Shamseddin is very troubled about his daughter; for the sultan of Egypt, hearing his women speak of her unparalleled beauty, asked her in marriage. Shamseddin, who had other views for his daughter, was thrown into great perplexity and said to the sultan: "My master and my lord, I pray you both to excuse and pardon me. You know the story of my poor brother Nureddin who was joint wazir with me; how he left the city after a trivial quarrel and has never been heard of since. My lord, when my daughter was born, I swore before Allah that I would never marry her to any but the son of my brother Nureddin. That was eighteen years ago. Now only a few days ago I heard to my great delight that my brother had married the wazir's daughter of Bassora and had a son by her; it is written in the stars that my child should marry her cousin. You, my lord, can choose any young girl you will and Egypt is full of many who are not unworthy of kings.''

But the sultan flew into a great rage and cried: ''Dog of a wazir, I have come down even as low as you, willing to do you the honour of marrying your daughter and you dare for some cold and silly reason to refuse me! Be it so. Now I swear that she shall marry the lowest cur about my palace.'' The sultan had a little horse-groom who was contorted and hunchbacked with a hump behind and a pigeon-breast in front. This little wretch he sent for and contracted to the daughter of Shamseddin, in spite of all her father's entreaties. He ordered a great wedding with all manner of music and bade the little hunchback sleep with the girl this very night.

When I left Cairo the young slaves were all gathered about the hunchback shooting off very amusing Egyptian pleasantries at him and wreathing the marriage candles about his head. I left them when they were about to take him to the bath, mocking him and calling out: ''We would rather have a jackass for a bridegroom than this miserable little half-man of a hunchback!'' Indeed, my sister, he is a most disgusting ugly little thing.

(Here the Jinni made a horrible face, remembering all the ugliness of the hunchback and spat on the ground. Then he continued):

The poor young girl, who is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen, yes, more beautiful even than this youth of yours, is called Sett El-Hosn; and indeed she is the Queen of Beauty. She was weeping bitterly, denied even her father's presence who had been forbidden to go to the marriage. Even now she is sitting there all alone in the middle of the festival surrounded by musicians, dancers, and singers. In a few minutes the disgusting horse-groom will be coming out of the hammam; they are only waiting for that before they begin the ceremony.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning, and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Twenty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that the Jinnia answered the Jinni in these words: "I think you must be mistaken in saying that Sett El-Hosn is more beautiful than this youth; it is impossible because he is the most beautiful human of all time." "I assure you that the girl is more beautiful still," said the Ifrit, "come and see for yourself; and at the same time we can prevent the evil hunchback from contaminating so marvellous a young woman. The two young people are worthy of each other; you would say that they were brother and sister or cousins at the least. Also it would be a horrible thing for a hunchback to marry with Sett El-Hosn.

"You are right, brother," said the Jinnia, "it will be a good work, and also we can then examine them and determine which is the more beautiful." So the Ifrit placed the young man on his back and, helped by the Jinnia, flew with all possible speed to Cairo.

They set down the lovely Hassan on a stone bench in a street near the palace which was all full of people and then woke him. Hassan was excessively disturbed at not finding himself stretched out on his father's tomb at Bassora. He looked to right and left and everything was unknown to him. It was not even the same city. So surprised was he that he opened his mouth to cry out; but before he could do so he saw a tall bearded man standing in front of him who winked and commanded silence.

Hassan controlled himself and the Jinni, for it was he, gave him a lighted candle and told him to mix with the crowd of candle bearers who were gathered to attend the marriage. "I am a Jinni, a true Believer," said the tall man. "This city is Cairo; I brought you here while you were asleep in order to do you a service, both for the love I bear to Allah and for your own exceeding beauty. Take this lighted candle, mingle with the crowd, and make your way to the hammam. You will see a sort of little hunchback coming out of it, whom the people will conduct to the palace. Follow; or rather get so near him that you walk by his side. He is newly married: your business is to enter the great hall of the palace with him as if you belonged to the place. Each time you see a singer, or a musician, or a dancer stop before the marriage party, plunge your hand into your pocket, which through my art will be always full of gold, and throw great hand-fulls of coin to all of them. Do not fear that your store will become exhausted; I will see to that. Give a hand-full to all that come, strike an attitude, and above all fear nothing. Trust in Allah Who made you so beautiful, and in me who love you. What comes to pass will be through the will and power of Allah."

With these words the Jinni disappeared and Hassan Badreddin said to himself: "What can all this mean? What service can this strange Ifrit be going to render me?" Nevertheless he went forward with his lighted candle and came to the hammam just when the hunchback was leaving in a new robe and on a fine horse.

Hassan mingled with the crowd and threaded his way so well that he came to the head of the procession and walked by the side of the hunchback. His beauty appeared in all its wonderful splendour. He was dressed in the fine robes which he had worn at Bassora: on his head was a tarboosh wound in the mode of Bassora with a wide silk turban all embroidered with silver and little tinted flowers; he wore a cloak enriched with falls of silk and broad decorations in gold thread. All this only added to his beauty.

Each time a singer or a dancer came out of the group of players and postured before the hunchback, Hassan threw her a hand-full of gold which fell before her or filled her little tambourine to overflowing. This he did with an air of perfect grace.

Soon all the women and even all the men of the crowd were giving all their attention to his beauty. At last the procession arrived at the palace; and there the chamberlains drove back the crowd, only allowing the troupe of musicians, dancers, and singers to enter behind the hunchback.

Then the singers and the dancers called to the chamberlains with one voice and said: "By Allah, you were right enough not to let men into the harem to help us with the habiting of the bride. But now we refuse to come in unless you let this young man enter with us. He has loaded us with gold and is our friend; we will make no festivity for you unless he also is there.''

The woman took hold of Hassan and dragged him into the great hall of the harem so that he and the little hunchback were the only two men there, much to the latter's disgust. All the wives of the emirs, the wazirs, and the chamberlains of the palace were ranged in two rows up the centre of the hall, each holding a great candle and having her face covered with a little white silk veil because of the presence of the men. Hassan and the hunchback passed between the two files which stretched right from the hall to the nuptial chamber and seated themselves on a dais.

Now all of the women when they saw the beauty of Hassan Badreddin, the charms of his figure and the moonlit glory of his face, caught their breath for love. In the bosom of each burned the tenderest thoughts. Never had they seen so handsome a youth and each wished that she might claim him for her own. Behind their veils their eyes glowed with the fires of love.

Unable to contain themselves any longer they lifted their veils, forgetting the presence of the hunchback, and clustered round Hassan to look at him, to speak a word or two of love, or to express with their eyes the desire they felt for him. All the time the dancers and singers were going about among them telling of Hassan's generosity and encouraging the ladies to favour him as much as possible; so that soon the fair guests were all crying: ''Allah, Allah, what a man! If only he could marry with Sett El-Hosn! They are made for each other! Allah confound the wicked hunchback!''

While the guests were still praising Hassan and calling down curses on the hunchback, suddenly the musicians struck gaily on their instruments, the door of the bridal chamber opened, and Sett El-Hosn, surrounded by slaves and eunuchs, entered the hall. Shamseddin's daughter shone there like a houri and had the appearance among her women of a moon leaving a cloud accompanied by stars. She was scented with musk, with amber, with roses; her delicately combed hair shone under silk; her slender shoulders showed valiantly beneath the richness of their covering. She was royally clad in a robe of red gold on which beasts and birds were portrayed in jewellery work; and beneath this were so many lighter underrobes that Allah alone could tell you of them or compute the value of each. I know not how many thousands of dinars had been paid for the collar about her little neck; there is no single man alive today, no not even a king, who owns one jewel the like of any of those thousands. To put the matter in a few words the bride was as beautiful as is the full moon on her fourteenth night.

Sett El-Hosn moved towards Hassan Badreddin of Bassora, since he was still seated on the dais, undulating her gracious body from left to right. When the hunchback groom would have leapt up and greeted her she thrust him back with horror and with one lithe movement stood again before Hassan. To think that he was her cousin and that neither of them knew it!

All the ladies began to laugh at what they saw, especially when the bride so obviously fell in love with Hassan that she cried: "O Allah, let this lovely boy be my husband and free me from the importunate hunchback!"

Hassan again plunged his hands into his pocket as he had been told to do and threw showers of gold among Sett El-Hosn's slaves, the dancers, and the singers, until they all shouted: "To you the bride!" and Badreddin smiled graciously upon them at this wish.

The hunchback sat alone through all this scene as ugly and as angry as an ape, chattering and cursing to himself. Each time a woman came near him she blew out her candle in mockery and all of the guests grinned at him and bated him with full-flavoured witticisms. One said: "Marry the air, little ape, like your forest brothers!" another: "You are no taller than our fair master's great finger!" a third: "If he should but touch you with his great finger it would send you flying into the stable!" and all laughed and mocked at the poor fellow.

Seven times, dressed in different fashion, the bride made progress round the hall followed by her ladies and at the end of each circle halted before Hassan. Each robe was more perfectly in keeping than the last; each set of jewellery infinitely in excess of the other, each lady was perfumed with the scents of India. All the time that she was walking round and round, the musicians excelled themselves, the singers sang songs progressively more amorous and exciting, and the dancers beating on their tambourines footed it like birds. Hassan went on throwing gold among them and even ladies of rank struggled to pick it up because it had touched his hand. Some of them even profited by the general mirth and excitement, the music and the heady singing, to make mock amorous advances to each other, their eyes fixed all the time on Hassan. Imagine the chagrin of the hunchback when one woman, turning to Hassan, openly offered him her lips. Another winked libidinously at him, while a third twisted and swayed her hips in unbridled gesturing. A fourth made highly improper advances. All delighted in showing, through word and action, the loathing and contempt they felt for the hunchback.

At the end of the bride's seventh circling of the room the festivities, which had lasted a great part of the night, were considered to be over. The music ceased; the players and the dancers and the singers and all the ladies passed before Hassan on their way out, kissing his hand or touching his robe and looking over their shoulders for a last glance. When all had disappeared save Hassan and the bridegroom, her own followers took the bride into the undressing chamber and there took off her garments one by one, saying as each was removed: "In the name of Allah!" to avert the evil eye. Then they left her with her old nurse whose duty it was to lead her to the bridal chamber when the hunchback should have gone there.

When they were alone the hunchback got up from his dais and said dryly to Hassan: "Indeed, my lord, you have greatly honoured us with your presence and overwhelmed us with your charities. Can it be that you are waiting for someone to throw you out?" Not knowing what to answer or what to do, Hassan rose and saying: "In the name of Allah!" left the hall. But at the door he was met by the Jinni, who said: "Where are you going to, Badreddin? Stay and listen to my instructions. The hunchback is just going to the closet where I will look after him. What you have to do is to enter the bridal chamber and when the bride comes in say to her: 'I am your husband; the hunchback is but the most wretched of our grooms. He is now back in the stable drinking a bowl of curdled milk to our good health. His introduction to your marriage was but a trick of the sultan and your father to ward off the evil eye.' Then take her without fear. lift her veil, and do what you shall find to do." With this the Jinni disappeared.

In a short time the hunchback went to the closet to make a motion before visiting his bride. He had squatted down on the marble and begun, when the Jinni, in the likeness of a huge rat, jumped up through the hole of the privy, calling: "Zik, zik!" as a rat does. The hunchback crying out: "Hesh, hesh!" clapped his hands to frighten the animal away. At once the rat became a large cat with very bright eyes which mewed at him. The hunchback continued what he was at, so the cat turned into a big dog which barked: "Hou, hou!" The hunchback became frightened and called out: "Get away you beast!" Then the dog swelled and turned into an ass which brayed: "Hak! hi hak!" into the hunchback's face and also broke wind with a noise like thunder. Filled with terror, the hunchback felt all his belly dissolve in a cramp and had hardly the strength to cry for help. But fearing that he might yet escape, the ass expanded and became a buffalo which completely blocked up the privy door. This time the Jinni spoke with a human voice and the hunchback heard the buffalo say: "Woe to you, pig of a hunchback, filthiest of grooms!" Hereupon the hunchback felt the cold of death assail him and slipped down, diarrhoea and all, to the ground, half undressed, with his teeth chattering, and skin creeping for very terror.

"Dwarf of the gutter!" cried the buffalo. "Could you find no other woman but my mistress to harbour your ignoble desire?" Then as the groom was too horrified to answer, he continued: "Answer me, or I will kill you here and now!" On this the hunchback managed to gasp out: "Before Allah, it is not my fault: I was forced to the business. And besides, my lord of the buffaloes, I had no idea that the girl had a lover among you. I swear that I repent and ask pardon both from Allah and from you." "Swear then by Him," said the Jinni, "that you will obey my orders." The bridegroom swore to be obedient and the Jinni gave him these instructions: "You must stay where you are till sunrise and then begone. If you say a word of all this to anyone I will break your head into a thousand pieces; and if ever again you set foot on the woman's side of the palace I will wrench it off and throw it into the common drain. Now to find a suitable position for you!" So saying, the buffalo took up the hunchback in his teeth and thrust him head-first into the yawning hole of the privy so that only his legs remained outside. "Do not dare to move," he repeated and then vanished. We must now leave the hunchback and return to Hassan Badreddin.

He stole through the private apartments and sat down in the depths of the marriage-chamber, leaving the hunchback and the Jinni to fight it out together. Hardly had he done so when the old nurse led in Sett El-Hosn and herself remaining at the door cried out to the hunchback whom she supposed to be there: "Rise, valiant hero, and do brilliantly by your wife! Allah be with you, my children!" Then the old trot withdrew.

Sett El-Hosn, her heart beating feebly, came forward murmuring: "I would rather die than give myself to this deformed little wretch." But when she had taken two or three steps she recognised the radiant Badreddin and gave a small cry of happiness, saying: "My dear, my dear, how kind of you to have waited for me! Are you alone? What happiness! I swear I thought that you meant to share me with that hunchback and that I would have the two of you about me." "Shame, my dear mistress!" answered Badreddin, "how can you have thought so?" "Then which of you is my husband?'' asked Sett El-Hosn. ''I am, sweet child,'' said Badreddin, ''the whole business about the hunchback was only a joke to make you laugh and a precaution against the evil eye. Your father hired him for ten dinars, and he is now back in his own stable drinking our health in curdled milk!''

Reassured by what he said, Sett El-Hosn smiled, then sweetly laughed, and finally broke out: ''Darling, in Allah's name, if what you say be true then am I, indeed, happy.'' Badreddin gravely assured her that he spoke the truth. Then Sett El-Hosn sat upon the lap of her lord and he perceived that she was most fair beneath her light robe. Her voice was as music to his ear. Her charms were more fair than the fairest garden. Badreddin's blood rushed through his veins and he caressed his bride mightily.

Sett El-Hosn gave thanks to Allah for her deliverance from the hideous and ape-like hunchback and strove that Badreddin might find her, in all things, desirable.

In haste, Badreddin arose to disrobe. He undid the innumerable rolls of his great trousers and placed them on the diwan with his purse of gold beneath them; he put his elegant turban on a chair, covering his head with the light nightcap which had been placed ready for the hunchback, and stood up in his gold-embroidered silken shirt and blue silk underpants fastened with heavy gold cord.

Sett El-Hosn had made ready for him. Badreddin gazed upon his bride and was glad. Surely no other had ever had a more precious pearl of loveliness. Perfect of form, ravishing of face, her dainty skin gleamed with the sheen of rare pearls. Badreddin pinched himself to make sure that this was no trick of the Jinni. Sett El-Hosn began to sing softly. He approached her and, with one brisk movement, he placed his lips against her lips. Who could count the kisses given and taken by these lovers? A counter of kisses is himself no lover.

It must have been at this time that Sett El-Hosn conceived, as you will hear later on, O Prince of all Believers.

Badreddin said as the rising sun gilded the room: "Day is the lovers' night." He lay down by the girl's side, pillowing her head gently upon his hand; she clasped him in her arms and so they lay.

Go to it with a will, my dears,
This is no time for fears;
God made one picture better far
Than painters' pictures are:
A man and wife abed,
His arm holding her head,
His face leant forward on her breast,
And all the tinted rest.

So Hassan Badreddin and Sett El-Hosn slept.

The Jinni had hurried from the hunchback to find the Jinnia and both of them were now looking down in admiration on the sleeping pair of young lovers, after having been invisibly present earlier in the night. "You see that I was right," said the Jinni, "the two young people are each as handsome as the other." Then he added: "Now we must take this beautiful young man up again and carry him to the place where we found him, by his father's tomb at Bassora. Lift quickly and I will help you, for morning is at hand." So the Ifrita lifted young Hassan upon her back, dressed only in his shirt (for his other raiment was left behind on the diwan) and flew away with him, followed closely by the Ifrit. While they were flying through the air the Ifrit was seized with libidinous thoughts and attempted to violate the Ifrita, burdened as she was by the weight of Hassan. At any other time she would not have been alarmed, but now she feared for the boy and was pleased enough when Allah intervened by hurling a thunderbolt at the Ifrit and dashing him to the earth. An Ifrit is terrible in passion and I think the two had a lucky escape. The Ifrita sank to earth beside the burning Ifrit; and it was written by Destiny that the place where she set Hassan down was near one of the gates of Damascus in the land of Syria.

When day rose the gates of the city were opened and the people who came forth for their business were astonished to see a lovely youth lying on the ground dressed only in his shirt, with a nightcap on his head and wearing no drawers. "Ah, how awake he must have been," some said, "to be so deep asleep!" But others exclaimed: "By Allah, he is fair! Lucky indeed must be his sweetheart! But why is he naked?" "Probably," answered a third group, "the poor young man was at a tavern longer than he should be and drank beyond his strength. Finding the gates shut he must have lain down to sleep outside them."

While they were speculating in this sort the morning wind came to kiss the lovely Hassan and lifted up his shirt so that all saw a belly, a navel, thigh, legs wrought of crystal, of a surprising beauty.

As they were enjoying all these splendours, Badreddin woke and seeing himself outside an unknown gate and surrounded by strangers, cried out: "Tell me where I am, good people, and why you stand about me in this way? What has happened?" "We stopped to look at you," they answered, "simply because you are beautiful. But do you not know that this is the gate of Damascus? Where have you passed the night that you should be lying here naked like this?" "What is this you tell me, my friends?" said Hassan. "I passed the night at Cairo and you tell me that I am at Damascus!" All laughed aloud at this, one saying: "A great eater of hashish, surely!" another: "Certainly he is mad! It is a pity that so peerless a boy should be mad." And a third: "What tale is this you tell us?" "As God lives, I am not lying, good people," said Hassan. "I passed last night in Cairo just as surely as I spent yesterday at Bassora my native city!" A great babble arose on these words, one saying that it was strange and another that he was mad and the most reeling with laughter and clapping their hands, crying: "Though it is a pity that this peerless boy has lost his wits, yet does he not make a delightful fool?"

One wiser than the rest said: "Try to clear your wits, my son, and do not say such foolish things." "I know what I am talking about," said Hassan. "Last night I was a bridegroom in Cairo." More convinced of his folly than ever, the crowd cried out: "He has been married in his dreams!" "What was it like?" "How great a man were you?" "Was she a houri or a harlot?" Beginning to be angry Badreddin answered them in earnest. "She was a houri; and I did not marry in my dreams, but in very truth, and there was no question of my manhood. I took the place of a diseased hunchback and even wore the nightcap which was meant for him: Here it is!" Then looking down at himself, he cried: "But, by Allah, good people, where are my turban and my drawers, my robe and my trousers? Yes, by Allah, where is my purse?"

Hassan jumped up and was starting to hunt about him for his clothes when all the assembly fell into such an ecstasy of winking that he made up his mind to enter the city as he was.

Poor Hassan was obliged to walk through all the streets and markets followed by a crowd of children, who yelled: "Look at the madman!" He was indeed at his wits' end when Allah, fearing that he might come to harm, led him by a certain baker's shop just as its master was opening for the day. Hassan leapt into the shop and hid himself, and as the pastrycook was a brawny fellow with a certain reputation in the city, the crowd retired.

The Hadj Abdalla—for so was the cook called—looked over young Hassan Badreddin carefully and on the spot fell in love with his beauty and his natural gifts. "Where do you come from, dear youth?" he asked of Hassan. "Tell me your story for I already love you more dearly than my life." So Hassan told all his story to Abdalla the cook, who was greatly surprised by it and said when it was ended: "My young lord Badreddin, your tale is indeed a marvellous one, but I would counsel you, my child, not to tell it to anyone else because it is a dangerous thing to confide in one's fellow men. All my shop is at your disposal, and I beg you to live here with me until Allah sees fit to make an end to your misfortunes I have no children and will be rejoiced if you will accept me as a father. Yes, I will adopt you as my son." "Let it be as you wish, dear uncle," answered Badreddin.

Straightway the pastrycook went to the market and bought fine robes to put on Hassan; and afterwards he took him before the kadi and adopted him as his son in the presence of witnesses.

Hassan stayed in the shop of the pastrycook as his son, taking the money and selling pastries, jars of jam, china pots of cream, and all those sweetmeats which the people of Damascus love. Having had lessons from his mother, the wife of the wazir Nureddin of Bassora, he soon picked up the art of making pastry, for which he had a considerable aptitude.

The beauty of Hassan, the fair young man from Bassora the son of the pastrycook, became a bye-word all through Damascus and the shop of Abdalla became the most famous of all the pastry shops in the city.

Now we will leave Hassan Badreddin and return to Sett El-Hosn the bride, daughter of the Wazir Shamseddin at Cairo. When she woke on the first night of her marriage and did not find Hassan beside her, she imagined that he had gone to the privy.

While she was waiting for him, her father Shamseddin came to ask her how the night had passed. He was in much confusion of spirit revolting in his soul against the injustice of the sultan who had married his daughter by force to a humpbacked slave. Before he entered he said: "Surely I will kill the girl if she has given herself to that gross freak of nature."

He knocked at the door and Sett El-Hosn rose in haste to open to him. She had become more beautiful even than was her wont. Her face was lighted from within and all her soul was on a tip-toe of joy at the beautiful love her fair stag had given her. When she came blushing to her father and kissed his hands, he was the more distressed to see her glad instead of sad and cried: "Shameless child, how dare you come before me in such a sprightly fashion from the bed of a diseased and malformed slave?" Sett El-Hosn smiled knowingly: "By Allah, father, the joke has gone far enough. Believe me I was sufficiently laughed at by all the guests on account of my pretended husband, that hunchback, who was not worth one nail-clipping of my fair lover, the real husband of my night. Ah, what a night it was, filled to the brim by the sweetness of my well-beloved! You have had your joke, my father, now speak no more of the hunchback.'' The wazir was so angry at these inexplicable words of his daughter that his eyes blazed blue with fury and he cried: ''What is all this, unhappy one? Do you tell me that the hunchback did not marry you in this chamber?'' ''Let us hear no more of this hunchback, my father; Allah curse him, and his father and his mother, and all his people! You must see that I know all about the trick which you played to keep off the evil eye.'' Then she told her father all the details of that night, adding: ''Ah, how happy I was, cradled in the lap of my dear one, my dark-eyed well-beloved, my glorious husband, whose manners are a god's and his brows like hunters' bows!''

''Are you mad, my daughter?'' asked the wazir. ''Where is this young man that you call your husband?'' ''He has gone to the privy,'' answered Sett El-Hosn; so the wazir in great disquiet ran to the privy and found the hunchback with his feet in the air and his head thrust deep in the hole. ''Is that you, hunchback?'' cried the wazir once and again; but the little man answered nothing, being terrified and thinking that it was the Jinni who had come. . . .

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Twenty-second Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that Giafar continued his story to the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid in these words:

The terrified hunchback, thinking that the Jinni had come back, would not answer a word until the angry wazir threatened to cut him in pieces with his sword. Then words came up through the hole after this manner: "Pity me, sweet king of all the Jinn and all the Ifrits! I swear that I have not moved once during the night!" "What are you saying?" cried the wazir. "I am no Jinni, but the father of your bride." A great sigh of relief came up from the privy and a voice saying: "If it is you, you can go out from here; I never want to set eyes on you again! Run away, or the soul-shaking Ifrit will come for you! I do not want to see you; you are the cause of all my troubles; you have married me to a lover of buffaloes, of asses, and of Ifrits. Be you accursed, and your daughter also, and every manner of unrighteous person!" "You are mad!" said the wazir. "Come out so that I can understand a little of what you say." But the hunchback answered: "I may be mad but I am not so mad as to come out without the Ifrit's permission. He said that I must not leave the hole till sunrise. Go away and leave me in peace. But first tell me if the sun has risen or not." More and more perplexed the wazir asked him what Ifrit it was that he was talking about and the hunchback told him all about his arrival at the privy, the appearance of the Ifrit under many forms; a rat, a cat, a dog, an ass, a buffalo, and lastly, what he had been made to undergo and what he had been forbidden to do.

The wazir seized the hunchback, who was weeping, by the legs and drew him out of the hole. No sooner had the mannikin stood upright, with his face all filthy and yellow and weeping, than he cried out: "Curses upon you and your daughter who loves buffaloes!" and ran as hard as he could yelling aloud and not daring to turn his head until he came to the palace and throwing himself at the sultan's feet sobbed out all the story of the Ifrit.

But Shamseddin returned to his daughter, and said: "My child, I feel that I am going mad; help me to see this tale clearly." "It is quite simple, father," answered the girl, "that charming young man, who was so much honoured at the wedding festivity, became my bridegroom and my lover, last night. I am certain that I am already with child by him. See, here is proof of what I say: his turban on the chair, his trousers on the divan, his drawers upon my bed; and I remember there is something under the trousers which he hid there." Going up to the chair, the wazir took the turban and began to scrutinise it carefully. "But this is such a turban as a wazir of Bassora might wear," he said. First he unrolled the stuff, and finding a pleat sewn in the bonnet, hastened to take the little packet out of it; then he examined the trousers and found beneath them the purse of a thousand dinars which the Jew had given to Hassan. In this purse there was a little bit of paper on which the Jew had written these few words: "I declare that I, so-and-so, merchant of Bassora, have paid over these dinars to the lord Hassan Badreddin, son of the wazir Nureddin, on whom be peace, in exchange for the cargo of the first ship of his which comes to Bassora." When he had read this receipt, Shamseddin uttered a great cry and almost fainted; but he controlled himself and with shaking fingers opened the packet which he had taken from the turban. At once he recognised the signature of his brother Nureddin and began to weep and beat his breast, exclaiming: "Alas, my poor brother! Alas, my poor brother!"

When he was a little calmer he said: "Surely, Allah is almighty! Daughter, do you know the name of him who lay with you all night? He is my nephew Hassan Badreddin, the son of Nureddin your uncle: these thousand dinars are your dowry, and God be praised!" He murmured these lines:

Of all our mutual landmarks I am fain,
I recollect our memories with pain;
And every prayer that I have ever prayed
Is that some god would send him back again.

When he had brought this verse to a close, he read over his brother's testament with deep attention and found the story both of Nureddin and the birth of Badreddin set out in full. When he had verified and compared the dates given by his brother with those of his own marriage and the birth of his daughter and found that in every respect they tallied, he was so amazed that he went straightway to the sultan and, showing him the papers, told him the whole affair. The sultan, in his turn, was so struck by the matter that he told the palace scribe to write out all the circumstances and preserve them with the utmost care in his library.

Shamseddin returned to his daughter and the two sat down to wait for Hassan Badreddin. At last when they began to understand that he had disappeared though they might not know why, Shamseddin said: "As Allah lives, this is an extraordinary and disquieting adventure. In truth never in all my life . . ."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent, rather than tire the sultan Shahryar, King of the Isles of India and China.

But When
The Twenty-third Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that Gaifar Al-Barmaki, wazir of Haroun Al-Rachid, thus continued his tale to the khalifat:

When the wazir Shamseddin saw that his nephew Hassan had disappeared, he said to himself: "Since the world is full of change and chance it will be well for me to take such percautions that when my nephew Hassan does come back he may be able to identify the circumstances of his marriage by detailing to me the exact disposition of all things in the bridal chamber." So he took pen and paper and wrote down object by object every least thing that had been in the room, thus: "Such a press was in such a place, such a curtain in such a place," and so on. When he had finished he read the list to his daughter and then, sealing it, locked it carefully away in his chest of documents. Also he put away beyond reach of mischance the turban, the trousers, the robe, and the purse of his nephew.

As Sett El-Hosn had thought, she had indeed become pregnant on her marriage night; and at the end of nine months she gave birth to a son, more beautiful than the moon if that were possible, as handsome and as perfect as his father. The women washed him and strengthened his eyes with kohl, then cut the cord and give him to a nurse. Because of his beauty they called him Ajib, that is to say the Marvellous.

When the admirable little Ajib was seven years old, the wazir Shamseddin sent him to a famous school, recommending him especially to the master. Every day Ajib would walk to school accompanied by Said, his grandfather's faithful black eunuch, returning for the mid-day meal and in the evenings. He remained at school for five years during which time he made himself quite insupportable to the children, cuffing and kicking them and saying: "Who are you beside me? I am the son of the wazir of Egypt!" At last when Ajib was twelve the other boys combined together and complained about him to the master. This good man, seeing that all the warnings he had given to the wazir's grandson had been in vain and not himself wishing to send him away from the school, said to the children: "Listen, and I will tell you something to say to Ajib which will prevent him coming among you any more. Tomorrow in play time all of you gather round him and one say to the others: 'By Allah, I know a good game; only no one must play unless he first says in a loud voice his own name and the names of his father and mother. Anyone who cannot say the names of his father and mother is a little bastard and cannot play with us.'" So next morning when Ajib arrived at school the other boys clustered round him and one of them cried out: "Yes, it is a splendid game, only no one can play unless he says his name and the name of his father and mother. Come let us start.''

One of the children came forward saying: ''I am Nabih; my mother is Nabiha, and my father is Izeddin.'' Another said: ''I am Najib; my mother is Gamila, and my father Mustapha.'' Others said the like till it came to Ajib's turn, when Ajib very proudly cried: ''I am Ajib; my mother is Sett El-Hosn, and my father is Shamseddin, wazir of Egypt!'' Then all the children cried: ''No, by Allah, he is not!'' and Ajib answered angrily: ''Allah confound you, the wazir *is* my father!'' On this the boys giggled and clapped their hands, and turning their backs on Ajib, cried: ''He does not know the name of his father! Shamseddin is the name of your grandfather, not your father. You cannot play with us.'' Then they all ran away shouting with laughter.

As Ajib sat alone sobbing as if his heart would break, the master approached him saying: ''Surely, my dear Ajib, you know that the wazir is not your father but your grandfather, the father of your mother, Sett El-Hosn. Neither you, nor we, nor anyone knows who your father is. The sultan married your mother to a hunchback groom but the rites were not consummated and he has never ceased to tell about the wonderful tales of having been shut up that night by all manner of Jinn so that they might themselves lie with Sett El-Hosn. All the story is embroidered with asses, buffaloes, dogs, and other equally credible things. So, my little Ajib, no one knows the name of your father and it is fitting for you to walk very humbly before Allah and your little companions who rightly consider you a bastard. Remember, Ajib, that you are exactly on an equality with any little slave boy in the market.

Hearing this discourse, little Ajib ran home straight to his mother, but he was so strangled with tears that he could not say a word to her. She took him up and kissed and comforted him, saying: "My boy, tell your mother what has happened." Then said little Ajib: "Tell me, mother, who my father is?" Sett El-Hosn was astonished and said: "The wazir, who else?" But Ajib said: "No, no, he is not my father; he is yours. If you do not tell me the truth I will kill myself with that dagger!" And the boy told his mother all that the master had said.

Remembering her cousin-husband and all the charm and beauty of her first night in the arms of Hassan Badreddin, Sett El-Hosn wept and sighed these verses:

He took my heart and carried it
I know not where;
I curse the day I married it
To such an one.

I told my tears to stint awhile
For I was fair:
And yet I let them glint awhile
Bright in the sun.

In case he should come back and see
I had no tear,
Or miss my mourning's lack and see
My cheeks undone.

She sobbed and Ajib sobbed too, so that the wazir Shamseddin heard them and came in. His heart bled at the tears of his children and he asked them why they wept. So Sett El-Hosn told him of what had happened at the school and the wazir who could not prevent himself from calling to mind all the misfortunes which had fallen first on himself, then on his brother Nureddin, then on his nephew Hassan Badreddin, and finally on little Ajib, sat down and wept in his turn. Afterwards he went in desperation to the sultan and, telling him the whole story, assured him that such a state of things could not continue without bringing dishonour on his name and on those of his children. The sultan therefore gave him leave to journey into the Levant to the city of Bassora to try to find his nephew; and also wrote decrees for him empowering him to make any researches that he wished in any place whatsoever. The wazir rejoiced at the bounty of the sultan, thanking him in many different ways and extolling his goodness and greatness. Finally he bowed down and kissing the earth between the sultan's hands, took his leave. Without an hour's delay he made ready for his journey and set out accompanied by his daughter Sett El-Hosn and by little Ajib. They travelled for many days towards Damascus, which was the first city on their journey, and in the end arrived there safely. Halting near the gates in the plain of Hasba they pitched their tents for two days' repose. All the retinue found Damascus a truly wonderful city filled both with trees and running water. There is a song which says:

There's no place like Damascus,
I had a day and night there,
There's beauty in Damascus
The trees are full of light there.

The flower dew in Damascus
Is worth its weight in rubies;

And they who hate Damascus
Are saintly sort of boobies.

The white lakes of Damascus
Are books and the birds read in them;
And the taverns of Damascus
Are good to those who feed in them.

The clouds write little stanzas
On all Damascus waters;
And I've heard the gentle answers
Of all slim Damascus daughters.

No one in all the wazir's caravan failed to visit the city, buying in its markets and even selling there a few things which they had brought from Egypt, bathing in the famous hammams, and visiting the mosque of Banu Omayyah, the Ommiades, which is in the middle of the city and has not its equal in the world.

While the others were doing these things, Ajib went up into the city to amuse himself, accompanied by the good eunuch, Said, who walked a few paces behind him carrying a whip large enough to stun a camel; for he knew the reputation of the people of Damascus and hoped to prevent them with his whip from approaching his beautiful young master. His precautions had not been wasted; for scarcely had they seen the handsome Ajib than all the men of Damascus began to call each other's attention to his grace and charm saying that he was sweeter than the northern breeze and more to be desired than water in thirst or health in sickness. Half the people left their houses and shops and ran behind Ajib all the time, in spite of the great whip, and the other half ran on ahead of him and sat down that they might watch his coming at greater leisure. At last Destiny lead Ajib and the eunuch to the shop of a pastrycook; and when they were in front of it they halted because the crowd was increasing at every moment.

Now you must know that this shop was none other than that of Hassan Badreddin, Ajib's father; for the old cook had died and Hassan as his adopted son had inherited the place. That day Hassan chanced to be preparing a delicious confection of choicely sugared pomegranate pulp. Seeing the two strangers stop before his shop Hassan looked up and was not only charmed by Ajib's unusual beauty but felt himself stirred and drawn towards him in a manner that was both divine and extraordinary. Full of this new love he called: "My little lord, you who have come to snatch away my heart and reign within my soul, you towards whom my bowels are moved within me, will you not honour my shop by stepping in? I pray you out of compassion for me, deign to taste some of the sweet things that I have made." Hassan's eyes were filled with tears as he spoke and he wept at all the memories which came back to him at the sight of Ajib.

The boy hearing his father's words felt his heart drawn towards him, so he turned to the eunuch saying: "Said, this pastrycook has touched my heart. I think he must have a son who is like me and who is far away. Let us go in to pleasure him and take what he sets before us. If we are compassionate to him in his grief, surely Allah will have pity on us and further our search for my father."

But Said the eunuch cried: "Oh no, no, my master! As Allah lives, we cannot do that! The son of a wazir cannot go into a common pastrycook's and eat there publicly. If you are afraid of all these ruffianly men who are following you about, rest assured that I can drive them off with my excellent whip. But as for going into the shop—no, decidedly no!" Hassan the pastrycook heard the eunuch's words so he turned his weeping eyes and tear-stained cheeks towards him saying: "Honourable one, why will you not have compassion on me and come into my shop? Your outside may be as black as a chestnut but inside I am sure you are as white as she. O you who have been praised in admirable verses by all our greatest poets, enter and I will reveal to you a future as white without as you are white within!" At this the brave eunuch burst into thunderous laughter, crying: "Really, really, have they so? Can you now? Well, well, in Allah's name let me hear!" So Hassan Badreddin made up these lines in praise of eunuchs on the spur of the moment:

His exquisite manners and tact
Have made him the trusted of kings;
And Peris would come down on wings
In fact
To help him consider each act
Of the sultan's divine little things.

These lines were so well turned and so pleasantly recited that the eunuch was greatly flattered; so taking Ajib's hand he entered the shop.

Hassan Badreddin was in the seventh heaven of delight and bustled about to do them suitable honour. He filled the fairest of his porcelain bowls with his conserve of sugared pomegranate, amended with almonds and delicately perfumed. This he presented on a beaten copper tray and watched his guests eat with every sign of satisfaction, saying: "This is indeed an honour for me! This is my lucky day! May all go down sweetly!"

After the first few mouthfuls, little Ajib asked the cook to sit down with them, saying: "Eat with us and it may be that Allah will help us in our search." "What, my child," said Hassan, "can you who are so young have already felt the pain of parting?" "Indeed I have, good fellow," answered Ajib, "my heart is already sorely tried by the loss of one I love, my own father. Even now my grandfather and I have set out to look for him through all the countries of the world." So saying Ajib wept and Badreddin also could not restrain his tears, while the eunuch looked on and sympathetically shook his head. Yet their grief did not prevent them from doing full justice to the delicately confected sweet-meat; in fact, so exquisite was it that they ate more than they really needed. The time passed all too swiftly for Hassan and soon the eunuch took Ajib away and set out with him for his grandfather's tents.

Badreddin felt that his soul had left with Ajib, and not being able to resist the desire to follow him, shut up his shop and, going after them in all haste, caught them up before they had passed through the great gate of Damascus. All this time Hassan had no idea that Ajib was his son.

When the eunuch saw that the cook was following he turned and asked him why he was doing so. "I have a business appointment outside the city," aswered Badreddin, "and wished to accompany you two as long as our road lay together. Truly your going away left me very desolate." "As Allah lives," cried out the eunuch angrily, "That wretched bowlful is going to cost us dear; for see, the giver of it wants to turn our stomach by dogging our footsteps from place to place!" But when Ajib saw the cook he blushed and stammered: "Let him be, Said; God's road is free to all good Mussulmans. If he follows us to the tents we will know that it is indeed me he is pursuing and then we can drive him off.'' With this he went on his way hanging his head; and the eunuch followed a few paces behind.

Hassan continued to follow them right to the plain of Hasba, where the tents of the wazir were pitched. When the other two turned and saw him just behind them, Ajib became really angry, fearing that the eunuch might tell his grandfather that he had gone into a cookshop and been followed about by the cook. Terrified at this thought he took up a stone and, supposing, since Hassan stood there motionless and with a strange light in his eyes, that the cook's intentions were dishonourable, he threw the stone with all his might, striking his father on the forehead. Ajib and the eunuch hastened to the tents, while Hassan fell fainting to the earth his face covered with blood. By good fortune he soon came to himself and staunched the blood, bandaged his forehead with a piece torn from his turban. Then he began to blame himself for what had happened, saying: ''It was all my fault; to shut my shop was ill-considered and to follow that lovely boy until he thought I had dishonourable designs upon him was even more incorrect.'' He returned sighing and murmuring: ''God is good!'' opened his shop again and settled down once more to the making and selling of pastries. Yet all the time he found himself thinking of his poor mother at Bassora who had given him his first lessons in the art. He would weep and say over this couplet:

Destiny will be fair to you and me;
But when she is, she'll not be Destiny.

Unwitting of all this the wazir Shamseddin, uncle of Hassan Badreddin the pastrycook, broke up his camp at the end of the third day and continued his journey towards Bassora. He fared through Hamah and Aleppo, Diyar Bakr, Maridij and Mosul, inquiring all the way, until he reached Bassora.

Without even waiting to rest, he presented himself before the sultan who received him cordially and enquired courteously about the reason of his journey. Shamseddin told him that he was the brother of the wazir Nureddin and at this name the sultan exclaimed: "Allah have mercy on his soul! Indeed, my friend, Nureddin was my wazir and I loved him dearly. He died fifteen years ago leaving a son Hassan Badreddin who was the apple of my eye. One day the boy disappeared and I have heard nothing of him since. But his mother, your brother's wife, still abides in Bassora, she who was the daughter of my old wazir, Nureddin's predecessor."

Shamseddin rejoiced at this piece of news and obtained permission to go to visit his sister-in-law at once. He hurried as fast as he could to his dead brother's house, thinking all the way of Nureddin and his lonely death in a far country. He wept as he went and recollected these lines:

I go back to the house and kiss
That wall and this:
Each panel a sweet ecstasy recalls,
I kiss and yet I do not love the walls.

Entering the great courtyard in front of the house he found a mighty door which was a granite picked out with multi-coloured marble. In its lower part there was let in a splendid plaque of pure white marble on which the name of Nureddin had been cut in letters of gold. Shamseddin bowed down and kissed the name, freshening the gold work with his tears and calling aloud these verses:

I ask the rising sun for news,
I ask the evening star for tidings.

Sleep cannot tell me of you
And the wastes of the night cannot report of you.

My heart is a still green fen;
Can you not come back
And make it run again in laughing water?

Men have called me large-hearted;
Yet my heart is not great enough
To hold anything but you.

Leaving the name wet with his tears he entered the house and came at last to the private apartment of his sister-in-law, Hassan's mother.

She had shut herself in this one apartment ever since the disappearance of her son and passed each day and night there in grief. In the middle of the apartment she had had a tomb built for her child whom she had long since given up for dead. All day she sat weeping by the tomb and at night slept with her head upon the stone of it. While Shamseddin was still outside the door of this place he heard the voice of his brother's wife, sorrowfully chanting:

Is he wasted, tomb?
Has he all gone down into you, tomb?
  Will I never see him again?

The world is barren with snow and dust,
But you in whom he put his trust,
  You within whom
  He lay down as a young bridegroom,
Are full of stars and flowers
And the bright hours
  Of Spring after the rain.

Shamseddin entered and saluting his sister-in-law with great respect told her that he was the brother of her husband Nureddin. He made known the whole story to her, how her son Hassan had lain one night with his daughter Sett El-Hosn, how he had disappeared in the morning, and how Sett El-Hosn had given birth to Ajib. "Ajib is here with me," he added, "he is your child as much as mine."

The widow who had so far sat like a woman of grief beyond the uses of the world, leapt to her feet as soon as she heard that her son had at least been alive after she had seen him last. She threw herself down before Shamseddin wazir of Egypt, and recited these lines in his honour:

I can refuse
Nothing to him who brings the news.
Give gold and silver, corn and wine,
Everything that is mine;
And add, if so he wishes, to all else
A trusting heart torn too much by farewells.

The wazir sent for Ajib; and when he came his grandmother fell on his neck and wept. Then said Shamseddin: "Mother, this is not a time for tears; rather must you prepare immediately for your departure with us for Egypt. God grant that we may all yet be united with your son Hassan." On this Ajib's grandmother rose quickly and got together all her goods, together with provisions for the way and her own personal servants. Shamseddin went to say farewell to the sultan of Bassora who gave him many presents and entrusted him with others for the sultan of Egypt. Then the wazir, with Ajib, the two women, and all his people, set out on his return journey.

When in the course of time they reached Damascus and pitched their tents in the same place as before, the wazir said: "I intend to stay here for a whole week in order to purchase fitting presents for the sultan of Egypt."

While the wazir was occupied with all the rich merchants of the place, Ajib said to the eunuch: "Baba Said, I want to be amused. Let us go up into the city and see what has been happening. I want to hear news of that pastrycook whom we treated so badly; for when he gave us pleasant things to eat I knocked him down with a stone." Said answered: "I hear and I obey!"

The two left the tents, Ajib being driven forward by the blind force of filial love, and after going through all the markets reached the cookshop just at that time when the Believers were flocking to the mosque of Banu Omayyah for the evening prayer. It so happened that Hassan Badreddin was again preparing the same delicious confection as on the former occasion; an artistic compost of pomegranate pulp with almond, sugar, and perfumes. Ajib, looking in, saw that the mark of the stone was still upon the cook's forehead, so his heart was moved and he called to him: "Peace be with you, O pastrycook! I have come all this way to have news of you: do you not recognise me?" At the first sight of his son Hassan felt his bowels turn over within him, his heart bound frantically, his head bow over of its own weight, and his tongue cleave to the palate of the mouth. Very humbly he answered with these lines:

I ranged my grievances and came
To where your golden eyes looked down;
I tried, but could not make a frown,
I tried, but could not hide a flame.

I wrote a commination
Of things that proved that you were foul;
I stood there like a love-sick owl
And had forgotten every one.

"Come in, my masters," he added, "just out of the kindness of your hearts, come in and taste my wares. As Allah lives, little lad, my heart was drawn towards you the first time I saw you. I am sorry that I followed you, for that was foolishness." "You are a very dangerous friend," answered Ajib, "you imperilled us all because of that little bite you gave us to eat. I will not come in and eat with you today unless you swear solemnly not to follow us. If you will not do so I shall never come here again. We are going to be in Damascus a whole week, while my grandfather buys presents for the sultan." "I swear that I will not follow you!" cried Badreddin; so Ajib and the eunuch entered the shop and as before Badreddin filled them a bowl with his pomegranate speciality. "Come and eat with us," said Ajib, "and it may be that Allah will help us in our search." Hassan sat down in front of them with great delight, but he could not help looking fixedly at Ajib all the time. So persistently did he do so that the boy was disturbed and said: "As Allah lives you are importunately, uncomfortably, even oppressively loving, my good friend. I have already had to speak to you about that. I pray you cease from eating all my face with your eyes." Badreddin answered with these rhymes:

I have a secret ecstasy, my friend,
Which you could never comprehend
Although you put the sun to rout
And chased the silver stars in doubt
Through all the heavens round about
And put the white moon out.

I have a guiltless love, dear lad,
Which I should hide although you had
Thrown all the sweetness in eclipse
Of a thousand China trading ships
With the lithe verses of your hips
And the sugar of your lips.

To these lines Badreddin added many others, some addressed to the eunuch, some to Ajib, until, after having eaten for a full hour, they could not swallow another grain. Then Hassan brought forward a fair copper ewer and poured perfumed water for their hands, afterwards wiping them dry himself with a towel of coloured silk hung at his belt. He fetched down a silver rose-water spray which was kept for great occasions on the highest shelf of the shop and perfumed them deliciously. Nor was this all. Darting out of the shop for an instant, he returned with two great tumblers filled with sherbert scented with musk-rose. Offering a tumbler to each, he said: "Put the keystone upon my happiness by drinking with me." Ajib and the eunuch drank and drank in turn until they felt fuller than they had ever been in their lives. So they thanked the cook and set off as quickly as they were able wishing to arrive at the caravan before sun-down.

As soon as they reached the tents Ajib hurried in to kiss his mother and his grandmother. As his grandmother was kissing him, she remembered her son Badreddin and burst into tears. When she was a little recovered she said these lines:

If I did not know that God Who breaks in two
A many thing, would some day mend it,
I could not live so calmly as I do.

He gave me life in trust, and I would end it
Did I not know He could renew
And bring back love however far he send it.

Then to Ajib she said: "My child where have you been?" "Through the markets of Damascus," he answered. "Then you must be hungry," said she, and rising quickly she brought him a great china bowl filled with a dish for which she was justly famous, a conserve of sugared pomegranate pulp which she had invented in her youth at Bassora and the art of which she had taught her child Badreddin.

She also said to the slave: "You may sit down and eat with your young master." So the unfortunate eunuch, trying to smile and saying below his breath: "As God lives, I cannot!" sat down by Ajib's side. Ajib, whose belly was one swelling clutter with all that he had eaten at the pastrycook's shop, took a mouthful and tasted it, but so full was he that he was quite unable to swallow. He seemed to find too little sugar in it, although this was not the case. With a wry face, he said to his grandmother: "This is no good, grandma." Hearing him, grandma choked with rage, crying: "How, my child, do you dare to pretend that I cannot cook? Is there anyone in the world who knows more about pastries and sweetmeats than I do, except perhaps it be your father Hassan whom I taught!" But Ajib answered: "As Allah lives, grandma, your conserve is not very delicately finished off; it lacks sugar. Let me tell you, only you must not tell grandpa or my mother, that we have just been offered some of the same by a pastrycook in one of the markets and my heart opened only at the smell, the way he made it. As for the taste, it would have brought appetite to a man dying of indigestion. Your conserve is not to be mentioned in the same breath, grandma."

At this slight upon her handiwork, grandma was even more incensed, so turning to the eunuch, she said: . . .

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent. Then Doniazade said to her: "Your words are sweet and pleasant to the taste." "But this is nothing," Shahrazade answered, "to that which I would tell you tomorrow night, if I were still alive and the King wished to preserve me." Then the King said in his soul: "By Allah, I will not kill her until I have heard the rest of this truly marvellous tale!" Then they passed the rest of the night in each other's arms. In the morning the King went down to the Hall of Justice and the Diwan was filled with people. The King sat in judgment, giving power and taking it away, guiding the people and making an end of cases that were brought before him until the fall of day. When the Diwan rose he went back to his palace. At nightfall he went in to Shahrazade and did with her as was his wont.

The Twenty-fourth Night
Came

and the young Doniazade, when she saw that the act was finished, got up from her carpet, saying to Shahrazade:

"Sister, I pray you finish your savoury tale of the beautiful Hassan Badreddin and his wife, the daughter of Shamseddin. You had just got to the words: 'Grandma turned to the eunuch, and said . . .' What in heaven's name was it that she said?"

Shahrazade smiled at her sister, saying: "I will finish my tale with all my heart and the best will in the world, but only if this courteous monarch gives me leave."

On this the King, who was devoured by curiosity to hear the end of the tale, said to Shahrazade: "You may continue!"

And Shahrazade said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that Ajib's grandmother threw a furious glance at the slave, saying: "Wretch, is it you who have been corrupting this child? How dared you take him into a pastrycook's shop?" The eunuch who was frightened out of his wits shook his head saying: "We did not go into the shop, we only passed by." But the foolish little Ajib cried: "By Allah we did go in, and had something fine to eat! I assure you grandma, it was very much better than yours."

Grandma ran in her rage to the wazir and told him of what she called "the terrible crime of the black eunuch." She so worked on Shamseddin, who was naturally choleric and had a supply of spleen always ready to be worked off on his people, that he hurried back to the tent with her and shouted: "Said, did you or did you not take Ajib into a pastrycook's?" "No, my lord," answered the terrified slave, but Ajib said maliciously: "Yes, we did go in and, listen, grandma, what we ate was so good that we are full to our throats; and then we drank a sherbert filled with powdered snow. How good it was! The cook was not stingy with his sugar like grandma."

The wazir was now doubly enraged against the eunuch, both for what he had done and for giving the lie to Ajib. "Said," he said, "I will only believe you if you sit down and eat every morsel of this excellent conserve which my sister-in-law has prepared. That will prove to me that you are fasting."

Said determined to do his best. He sat down before the pomegranate conserve and tried to begin, but he was forced to spit out even the first mouthful. There was no room for it inside him. He told the wazir that he had been overcome by an indigestion the night before while over-eating with the other slaves; but the wazir knew that he lied, so he had him thrown to the ground by the other slaves and beat him mercilessly until the eunuch confessed the truth, saying: "Indeed, my lord, indeed we did go into a pastrycook's in the market; and the dish he set before us was more delicious than anything I have dreamed of in my life. It is profanity to have tasted this other disgusting mess. You cannot think how bad it is."

On this the wazir burst out laughing, but grandma was by no means contented. Wounded in her tenderest pride, she cried: "Liar! I defy you to bring me a like dish from your pastrycook! It is all your imagination. Take this bowl if you dare and bring me back some of the conserve. My brother-in-law shall be the judge between mine and it."

So the eunuch, clutching a half dinar and a porcelain bowl, hurried back to the shop and said to the pastrycook: "Look here, my fine fellow, some of the gentlemen of our house have taken on a bet about that dish of yours. Please give me half a dinar's worth in this bowl that the gentlemen may compare it with a pomegranate conserve that one of them has made. Put all your art in it, for I do not want to eat any more stick because of you. I am still all sore about my back." Hassan Badreddin burst out laughing and answered him: "Do not be afraid. No one in the world can make the dish as I do, except perhaps my mother who is away in a far country."

Badreddin carefully filled the bowl and ended by adding just a suspicion of musk and rose-water. When the cook was at last satisfied the eunuch hurried back with the bowl to the caravan. Ajib's grandmother at once took hold of it and placed some of its contents in her mouth upon the spot. But hardly had it touched her lips than she gave a great cry and fell all in a heap on the ground. She had recognised the hand of her son, Hassan.

The wazir and all who were with him threw water in the grandma's face and at the end of an hour she recovered consciousness, saying with her first words: "As God lives, the man who made this pomegranate preserve was no other than my son Hassan Badreddin. I taught the art to Hassan and no one else in all the world knew of it."

The wazir's joy and impatience were thus both raised to fever point. "At last God has been good to us!" he cried, and calling his servants he reflected a few moments over a plan that had come into his head, and then issued these instructions: "Let twenty men go to the cookshop of one known in the markets as Hassan of Bassora, and raze it to the ground, destroying it utterly; and let them bind the pastrycook's hands behind his back with his own turban and bring him to me; but on no account must they hurt him in any way while doing so."

The wazir himself took horse and carried the letters which the sultan of Egypt had given him to the Cairene lieutenant-governor in Damascus, who kissed them respectfully and carried them to his forehead in veneration. He asked the wazir whom he wished seized and the other answered that it was simply a pastrycook in one of the markets. "Nothing is more simple," said the governor and ordered his guards to go to help the wazir's men at the shop. Shamseddin then took leave of the lieutenant-governor and returned to the caravan.

A host of men armed with sticks, mattocks, and axes appeared before Hassan Badreddin and began to break his shop into little pieces, smashing all its appointments and casting the pastries and sweetmeats into the road. Then they fastened Hassan's hands behind his back with his turban and hurried him away without saying a word. As he was being hailed along, Hassan kept on saying to himself: "By Allah, I believe that pomegranate conserve is at the bottom of all this!"

When he had been led into the presence of the wazir, Hassan burst into tears, crying: "My lord, what crime have I committed?" "Was it you who prepared the pomegranate conserve?" asked the wazir. "I did, my lord," answered Hassan. "Is that a hanging matter?" "A hanging matter?" replied the wazir. "That shall be the least of your punishments. Prepare for much worse!"

You must know that the wazir had asked the two women to let him carry out the matter in his own way, as he did not wish to tell them the result of his search until they should all be returned to Cairo.

He called one of his camel boys and bade him bring a great wooden chest into which the terrified Hassan was thrust. Then the chest was fastened with a heavy wooden cover and mounted on a camel.

Breaking camp the wazir's party proceeded in the direction of Cairo till nightfall. When they halted for food, Hassan was allowed out of his case for a few moments, given something to eat, and then put back. For some days the journey continued, Hassan being let out from time to time and brought up for a fresh interrogation before the wazir, who said on each occasion: "Was it you who prepared the pomegranate conserve?" The trembling Hassan invariably replied: "Yes, my lord," and then the wazir would say: "Bind this man and put him back in the chest."

When they came within sight of Cairo they halted at the camping ground Raydanian and the wazir commanded Hassan to be brought to him. When Hassan had come, Shamseddin sent also for the carpenter, to whom he said: "Take this man's measures and prepare a cross for him; then fasten the cross firmly upright in a buffalo cart." "My lord," cried Hassan, "what are you going to do to me?" "I am going to crucify you," answered the wazir, "and have you dragged through the streets as a show for the inhabitants." "But for what crime?" moaned the unfortunate Hassan. "For your pomegranate conserve,'' answered Shamseddin, ''there was not enough pepper in it.'' On this Badreddin beat his cheeks and cried: ''By Allah, is this my crime? Is it for this I had to undergo the long torture of the journey, with food only once a day and a crucifixion at the end of it?'' ''That is so,'' answered the wazir very sternly, ''not enough pepper, not enough pepper!'' Hassan Bedreddin sank to the earth and remained there a long time in deep and sorrowful reflection. At last the wazir said: ''What are you thinking of?'' ''Nothing very much,'' answered Hassan, ''simply that of all the incredibly thick-headed fools on the earth, you are the most incredibly thick-headed. If you were not the supreme ass of all time you would not treat me so for the matter of a little pepper.'' ''I see no other way of ensuring that you do not do it again,'' answered the wazir. ''What is the use of talking to such a mud-witted madman?'' exclaimed Hassan. ''If anyone has committed a crime, you have: in fact, you have committed several.'' ''I am afraid it must be the cross,'' answered the wazir.

All the time that they were talking the carpenter went on working at the cross, casting an eye from time to time at Hassan, as much as to say: ''Ah, you are still there!''

Night fell while they were speaking and Hassan was put back in his box, the wazir crying after him: ''You will be crucified tomorrow!'' Shamseddin waited a few hours until Hassan was fast asleep in the box and then, loading him again on the camel, set out with all his retinue and came to his own house in Cairo.

It was only then that the wazir was willing to tell his daughter and his sister-in-law of all that had happened. First he went to Sett El-Hosn and said:

"Praise Allah, my child, who has at last given Hassan Badreddin back to us. Rise up my daughter and be happy! I wish you carefully to arrange all the carpets and furniture of the house, and especially of your bridal chamber, exactly as they were on the night of your marriage." Although Sett El-Hosn was trembling with joyful surprise she gave the necessary orders to the slaves and they set to work. The wazir took the list that he had made and, reading slowly, helped them to arrange the least thing in its proper place. So well were his orders carried out that the sharpest eye would have believed that it was still the night of the marriage of Sett El-Hosn and the hunchback.

With his own hand the wazir placed all the clothes of Badreddin where they had been before: his turban on the chair, his drawers on the disordered bed, his trousers on the diwan, and, below the last, the purse which held the thousand dinars and the Jew's receipt. Finally he sewed Nureddin's memorial back in its place between the bonnet and sash of the turban.

He told his daughter to get into the same undress as on that other night, to go into the bridal chamber, and prepare to receive her husband Hassan back again. "When he comes," said Shamseddin, "tell him he has been long at the privy and ask him if he is unwell." Also he recommended his daughter, though she did not need such counsel, to entreat her cousin sweetly and make him pass a pleasant night, not forgetting to regale him with pleasant conversation and the beautiful verses of the poets.

Leaving his daughter to make these preparations, he hurried to the chamber where Hassan's box had been placed and took him from it in a heavy sleep. He undressed him, put a fine shirt and nightcap on him, such as he had worn on that other night, and lastly carried him to the doors of the bridal chamber and, opening them, went away on tip-toe.

Soon Hassan awoke and his wits went all astray at finding himself almost naked in a brilliantly lighted corridor which he seemed to have seen before. "Is this the deepest of deep dreams?" he asked himself. "Or am I awake?"

After a few minutes of stupefaction he got up and walked a few steps along the corridor. As he looked through one of the doors, his breathing stopped altogether. To one side was the very hall in which he had been so honoured and the hunchback so much humbled; while on the other side appeared the bridal chamber with his turban on a chair and his trousers on a divan. Sweat broke out on his face, and he asked himself first whether he was awake, next whether he was asleep, and last whether he was mad. Moving towards the bridal chamber by taking as it were one step forward and one step back, he said to himself: "As Allah lives, my boy, this is no dream! And yet I was shut up in a box and that was no dream either." With this he put his head round the door of the room.

There, below the finest of blue silk quilts, lay Sett El-Hosn in all her vivid beauty, who gently held up one side of the quilt, saying: "Dear master, you have been a long time in the privy. Come to me, come!"

Poor Hassan at these words burst into peal after peal of foolish laughter as if he had eaten hashish or smoked opium. "Ho, ho, ho, ho! What a dream! what a dream!" he hiccoughed, and began to walk forward as if he were treading on snakes, holding up his shirt tails with one hand, feeling the air with the other, and taking all the infinite precautions of a blind man or a drunkard. Suddenly he sank down on the carpet in the middle of the room and began to consider owlishly, making imbecile gestures with his hands. More than at anything else he stared at the strings of his purse hanging down under his trousers as they had before, and at his turban still in the same folds as he had known before.

Sett El-Hosn spoke again from the bed: "What is it, my love? You seem to be perplexed and to tremble a little, and yet we were only at the beginning. Can it be . . . ?" On this Badreddin began to open and shut his mouth, saying: "So we were only at the beginning, were we? That is good. What beginning and of what night? My dear, I have been away for years and years." "Calm yourself for the love of Allah," said his bride. "I speak of tonight and the great love we have shown for each other. You went to the privy and have been away an hour. You must be ill, my darling. Come and I will warm you, my heart, my eyes, my very dear." "Can it be true?" answered Badreddin. "Can I have gone to sleep in the privy and dreamed the whole of that horrible dream? I thought I was a pastrycook in Damascus for ten years and a beautiful boy came to me. . . ." Here he brushed the sweat from his forehead and felt his scar there. "It cannot be a dream!" he exclaimed. "The boy made this scar with a stone, and yet it must be a dream. Perhaps you gave me this mark when we were dreaming just now. I dreamed that I made a pomegranate conserve and put too little pepper in it: that I was shut up in a box and about to be crucified. By Allah, that wretched box felt real enough!"

"But why should anyone wish to crucify you?" asked Sett El-Hosn, and he answered: "Because I had put too little pepper in the pomegranate." Shamseddin's daughter, being unable to contain herself longer, threw herself upon his neck and kissing him with all her stored up love drew him to the bed, where he fell down in heavy slumber. Sett El-Hosn watched over him all night, and sometimes he muttered. "It is a dream!" and sometimes: "No, it is real!"

In the morning Hassan woke with a calm mind to find himself in the arms of Sett El-Hosn and the wazir Shamseddin standing at the foot of the bed. Said Badreddin: "Was it not you who broke up all my shop for the sake of a little pepper?"

To which, since there was no reason any longer for keeping silence, the wazir answered:

"Listen to the truth, my child. You are my nephew Hassan Badreddin, son of my dear brother Nureddin, wazir of Bassora. I was forced to submit you to these trials in order to be sure that it was really you who had been with my daughter on her marriage night. I was hidden behind a curtain and saw you recognise everything. You must excuse me, my boy; there was no other way, as I had never seen you in my life. To think, to think, that all this should have come about through one little misunderstanding between Nureddin and myself!"

The wazir told him all the story of that early quarrel and added: "Dear son of mine, I have brought your mother from Bassora; you shall see her soon and you shall see your son, Ajib, child of your bridal night."

The good old man ran to look for them; and the first to come was little Ajib, who did not fear his father as he had feared the amorous pastrycook, but threw himself upon his neck in a passion of love. Badreddin lifted up his eyes, murmuring these lines:

I swore by the blood of my tears
That I would never let you go in all the years,
If Allah should repent.
But Allah never sent
My fair one to his dear that I might mind him
And I took weary years to find him.

Yet who could praise His name enough
Who after all has given
So constant a return of all my constant love
And made a heaven
In which two empty hearts can lie down sated
And perfected and mated?

Then came Badreddin's mother almost fainting for joy and threw herself into his arms.

You can imagine what tears of joy there were, what exchange of stories, what healing of old wounds. They all thanked Allah who had brought them together safely in the end; and each lived in joyful prosperity and pure delights until the end of their days which were many. They left behind them a galaxy of children, each one having the combined beauty of the moon and stars.

That, O auspicious King, said Shahrazade, is the incredible tale which Giafar Al-Barmaki told in Baghdad to the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid, Prince of Believers.

Yes, that is the tale of the wazir Shamseddin, his brother the wazir Nureddin, and of Hassan Badreddin, Nureddin's son.

You must know that the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid did not fail to say: "As Allah lives, that is not only a marvellous but a very pleasing tale." So delighted was he, that he not only spared the life of the negro Rihan, but also took under his protection the young man whose wife had been cut in pieces, as is related in the story of the Three Apples. To make up to him for the loss of his wife he selected a very beautiful virgin to be his concubine, made him a sumptuous allowance, and honoured him as an intimate and cup-mate. Lastly he ordered the palace scribes to record Giafar's tale in their most refined caligraphy, and had the whole shut away among the records, that it might serve as a lesson to his children's children.

"But," continued the nimble and discreet Shahrazade, addressing herself to King Shahryar, sultan of the Isles of India and China, "do not believe, O auspicious King, that this story is in any way as admirable as one which I had reserved for your ears if you are not weary." "What story is that?" asked King Shahryar. "It is a much more wonderful tale than any of the others," said Shahrazade. "But what is it called?" asked the King.

She replied:

"It is the Tale of the Tailor, the Hunchback, the Jew, the Christian, and the Barber of Baghdad."

"You may tell it to me," said King Shahryar.

THE TALE OF THE HUNCHBACK WITH THE TAILOR, THE CHRISTIAN BROKER, THE STEWARD, AND THE JEWISH DOCTOR; WHAT FOLLOWED AFTER; AND THE TALES WHICH EACH OF THEM TOLD

Then Shahrazade said to King Shahryar:

It is related, O auspicious King, that there was once long ago in a city of China a prosperous and merry-minded tailor. He was fond of pleasure and it was his custom from time to time to go out with his wife for a walk through the streets and gardens to look at the life of the city. One day when they were returning home in the evening after a long pleasure jaunt they met a hunchback of such droll appearance that neither grief nor melancholy could live for a moment in his presence, and the saddest man would have laughed aloud on seeing him. The tailor and his wife were so greatly amused by the little fellow's sallies that they asked him to come back home with them and spend the night as their guest. The hunchback accepted and, when they had all arrived at the shop, the tailor hurried out to the market and managed to buy, before it closed, some fried fish, bread, limes, and a great cake of white sesame sweetmeat for dessert. When he had brought these back and set them before the hunchback all three sat down to eat.

During the gay meal the tailor's wife moulded a great lump of fish in her hands and, popping it in the hunchback's mouth for a joke, placed her hand over his lips so that he could not spit out the morsel. Then she cried: "By Allah, you must take it down in a single mouthful or I will not let go!"

With a mighty effort the hunchback swallowed the piece of fish; but as ill-luck would have it there was a large bone concealed inside which stuck in his throat, so that he died upon the spot.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent, not wishing to take further advantage of the King's permission.

Then Doniazade said to her: "Your words are sweet, pure and pleasant to the taste!" "What would you say then," Shahrazade answered, "to the thing which I will tell you tomorrow night, if I am still alive and the gracious King wishes to preserve me?"

The King said in his soul: "By Allah, I will not kill her until I have heard the rest of this truly marvellous tale!"

Then he took her in his arms and they lay together lovingly all night. In the morning the King went down to the Hall of Justice and the Diwan was filled with people. He sat in judgment, giving power and taking it away, guiding the people and making an end of cases which they had brought before him, until the fall of day. When the Diwan rose he went back to his apartments where he found Shahrazade.

And When
The Twenty-fifth Night
Had Come

DONIAZADE SAID to Shahrazade: "Sister, I pray you finish your tale of the hunchback with the tailor and his wife." Shahrazade answered: "I will finish it with all my heart and the best will in the world, but only if this courteous monarch gives me leave." "You may continue!" said the King hastily.

And Shahrazade said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the tailor saw the hunchback die before his eyes, he cried: "There is no power nor might save in Allah! O cursed fate that this poor man should have died thus under our hands!" "What is the use of lamenting like that?" asked his wife. "Do you not know these lines?:—

'The last place where a helper shall be found
Is in that quarter whence the danger came;
You would not treat a scalded hand with flame,
Or give a cup of water to the drowned.' "

"What must I do then?" said the tailor. "Rise up," she said, "and help me carry out the body. We will cover it with a silk shawl and take it away this very night. I shall walk in front and you must follow me, saying in a loud voice: 'This is my child. That is his mother. We are looking for a doctor. Where is the doctor?' "

As soon as he heard his wife's plan the tailor wrapped up the hunchback's body and carried it out of the house. His wife walked in front of him, calling: "My child, my child! Who will save him? Tell me, little one, where is it hurting now? Ah, this cursed small-pox! Where are the pustules, little one?" Everyone who passed them heard her, and saying: "This man and woman are carrying their child to the doctor. He has been stricken down by the small-pox," gave them as wide a berth as possible.

The tailor and his wife walked on in this way, asking on all sides for a doctor, until they were directed to the door of a certain Jewish physician. They knocked and, when a negress came down and opened the door, the wife said to her: "We want the doctor to examine our poor child. Take this quarter dinar and give it to your master in advance. Beg him to come down quickly, for the child is very ill."

When the slave had gone up to inform her master, the tailor's wife darted into the house, and, beckoning her husband to follow her, said: "Leave the body here and let us flee for our lives!" The tailor set up the hunchback's corpse on one of the stairs, propping it against the wall; and then the two ran away as fast as their legs could carry them.

As soon as the slave told the doctor who was below and gave him the quarter dinar he rejoiced and began to run down stairs, forgetting in his haste the lamp with which he was accustomed to light himself. He ran down so quickly that his foot struck against the body and he toppled it over. Terrified at seeing a man tumbling down the stairs the Jew ran to him. Finding him dead and thinking that he himself had just killed him, he called out: "Lord, lord! O jealous God! By the ten Sacred Words, how can I get rid of the body?" At last, still calling on the names of Aaron, Joshua the son of Nun, and the rest, he carried the body into the courtyard of his house and showed it to his wife. When she saw the corpse, the terrified woman exclaimed: "It cannot stay here: we must get rid of it. If it is still in the house at sunrise we are lost! I know; we will take it out on to our terrace and from there throw it into the house of our neighbour the Mussulman. You know he is steward of the sultan's kitchen and that his house is infested by cats and rats and dogs who come down by way of the terrace to eat the butter and the fat, the oil and the corn. They will devour the body and no one will be any the wiser.''

In accordance with this plan, the Jew and his wife took up the body of the hunchback and gently lowered it from their terrace down through the wind-shaft of the steward's house until it rested against the wall of his kitchen. Then they went back quietly the way they had come.

Now it so happened that the next minute the steward, who had been away from home, returned and saw, by the light of a candle which he lit as soon as he opened the door, the figure of a man leaning up against the wall of his kitchen. ''By Allah,'' he cried, ''so my robber is a man after all and not an animal! To think that he should have taken all the meat and fat which I have been so careful to lock away from marauding cats and dogs! What was the good of my plan for killing all the cats and dogs in the neighbourhood, when all the time it was this fellow, slipping down from the terrace and taking everything he could lay his hands on?'' So saying the steward took up a mighty club, and, knocking the man over with one blow, began to belabour him about the breast. But the figure did not move and bending over it the steward discovered that the man was dead. In his terror and grief he called out: ''There is no power or might save in Allah! Curses on the butter and the fat, on the meat and on this thrice unlucky night! Ruin seize this corpse! Was it not enough for you to be a hunchback? Why have you got to be a thief as well and steal my meat and fat? Merciful God, hide me beneath Thy veil!'' Then, seeing that the night was far advanced, the steward took up the hunchback on his shoulders and leaving the house walked with him as far as the outskirts of the market. There he placed the body upright in the angle of a shop, at the corner of a side street, and went his way.

Soon after a Christian passed that way, a broker who, being drunk, was going to bathe at the hammam. The wine had given birth to curious fancies in his head, so that he went along murmuring: "Christ is coming! Christ is just coming!" and zigzagging from one side of the road to the other. When he came opposite the body, without noticing it, he stopped and turned round to make water. Seeing the figure close to him against the wall he thought that it must be a robber; perhaps even that one who had stolen his turban earlier in the evening. With these thoughts buzzing in his head the Christian leapt upon the hunchback and fetched him so heavy a blow across the neck that he fell to the ground. The drunkard then fell upon his adversary, calling loudly for the market-guard, beating the figure below him with his fists and trying to strangle him. When the market-guard ran up and saw a Christian thus assaulting a Mussulman, he called out: "Leave go, and get up!"

The Christian got up and the market-guard bending over the hunchback discovered that he was dead. "Whoever saw the like of this!" he cried. "A Christian daring to kill a Believer!" Thereupon he seized the broker, bound his hands behind his neck, and led him to the house of the wali. All the way the prisoner lamented, saying: "O Jesus! O, Our Lady! However did I come to kill this man? How came he to die so easily? Drunkenness is over and done; cometh reflection."

When they came to the wali's house the Christian and the hunchback were locked up until the wali should wake in the morning. After sunrise the Christian was examined concerning the crime and could not deny the testimony of the market-guard. There was no course open to the wali except to condemn the Christian to death; so he ordered the public executioner first to announce the broker's punishment throughout the city and then to get the gallows ready. While the executioner was making a running noose in the rope and fitting it about the Christian's neck, the sultan's steward suddenly burst through the crowd and forcing a path for himself right to the foot of the gallows, cried: "Stop, stop! It was I who killed the man!" "Why did you kill him?" asked the wali. "I will tell you," answered the other. "Tonight, when I returned to my house, I saw a man who had broken in by way of the terrace to steal my provisions. I beat him on the breast with a club and he died. Then I carried the body on my shoulders and set it upright against a shop in the market, in such and such a place. Ah me, unhappy! Not only have I killed a Mussulman, but I have only just escaped killing a Christian too! I am the one to be hanged!"

When the wali heard the steward's story he let the Christian go, saying to the executioner: "Hang this man instead; for he is condemned out of his own mouth."

The executioner fitted the same rope to the steward's neck and leading him under the gallows was about to hang him, when suddenly the Jewish doctor forced his way through the crowd, crying: "Wait, wait! It was I who killed the man! He came to consult me and as I was running down the stairs in the dark I tripped him, so that he fell to the bottom and died. It is not the steward that you ought to hang, but me."

The wali gave orders for the death of the Jewish doctor; and the executioner, having taken the rope from about the steward's neck, put it round the throat of the doctor, and was on the point of hanging him, when the tailor broke through the crowd about the gallows, crying: "Stop, stop! It was I alone who killed the man. Yesterday I took a holiday and when I was returning to my house in the evening I met the hunchback, who was drunk and very gay, playing a tambourine and singing with all his heart most merry songs. I asked him to come home with me, and when I had bought some fish and other things we sat down to eat. Then my wife, by way of a joke, moulded a lump of fish in a lump of bread and stuffed the handful into the hunchback's mouth. The fish choked the poor little fellow, who died on the spot. My wife and I took the body and carried it to the house of this Jewish doctor. A negress opened the door to us and I gave her a quarter of a dinar for her master, asking her to tell him that we had brought a patient to see him. She hurried away and I set the hunchback upright against the wall of the staircase; then we both made off as fast as we could. The doctor came running down the stairs to see his patient, knocked against the body which fell down stairs, and then thought that he had killed the man himself. Is that not true?" continued the tailor turning to the doctor. "That is the very truth," answered the Jew. "Then you must release this man and hang me," said the tailor to the wali.

At this last turn of the business the wali was more astonished than he had ever been in his life. "The tale of this hunchback ought to be put in the annals and written in books," he said; then he ordered the executioner to release the Jew and hang the tailor on his own confession. The hangman led the tailor under the gallows and put the rope round his neck, saying: "This is the last time. I will not change my prisoner again." With this he seized the rope.

Now the hunchback, whom all this bother was about, was the sultan's jester, and the king could not abide him out of his sight for an hour. The night before the jester had got drunk, left the palace, and stayed out all night. When the sultan asked for him in the morning, they said: "My lord, the wali informs us that the hunchback is dead and that his murderer is about to be hanged. In fact, the wali had had the murderer placed below the gallows and the executioner was about to hang him, when there came a second person, then a third, and finally a fourth, each saying: 'It was I who killed the hunchback!' and each telling the wali the circumstances of the murder."

The sultan called a chamberlain to him, on hearing this, and bade him run with all speed to the wali and order him to bring all those concerned in the death of the hunchback to the palace.

The chamberlain set out at once and arrived just in time to prevent the executioner from hanging the tailor. He told the wali how the matter had come to the sultan's ears and the latter at once presented himself before the king, followed by the tailor, the Jewish doctor, the Christian broker, and the steward, and with the body of the hunchback carried behind him.

He kissed the earth between the king's hands and told him the whole story with every detail from beginning to end. But as you have heard it twice I shall not repeat it. By the end of it the king was not only astonished but burst into a hearty fit of laughter. He ordered the palace historian to write out the tale in letters of liquid gold, and then said to all that were before him: "Have you ever heard a tale equal to this one?"

The Christian broker advanced and kissed the earth between the king's hands, saying: "Ruler of the ages and of all time, I know a tale much more astonishing than our adventure with this hunchback. If you allow me, I will tell it to you: for it is both more marvellous and more pleasant than the tale which you have just heard."

"Certainly," said the king, "let us hear it, that we may judge."

So the Christian broker told:

THE TALE OF THE CHRISTIAN BROKER

King of all time, I came to this land on business and as a stranger whom Fate guided to your kingdom. I was born in Cairo, a Copt among the Copts of that place, and was brought up in that city by my father who was a broker before me.

When he died I had already reached man's estate, so I adopted his profession, seeing that I had every qualification for this business, which is a most usual one among us Copts.

One day, as I was sitting outside the gate of the grain market, I saw a young man coming towards me mounted on an ass with a red saddle. He was as handsome as a man could be and was dressed in clothes of surprising richness. When he caught sight of me he saluted and I rose and greeted him. He handed me a handkerchief which contained a small sample of sesame, saying: "How much is an ardeb of this kind worth?" "A hundred dirhams," I answered. Then he said: "Pray bring grain measures with you and come to the khan al-Jawali in the Gate of Victory quarter. I shall be waiting for you." He left the handkerchief containing the sample with me and rode on his way.

At once I visited the grain merchants and when I showed them the sample which I had quoted at a hundred dirhams they bid a hundred and twenty for an ardeb, to my great delight. I took four measures with me and going to the place he had mentioned found the young man waiting. He took me to his granary and there my measurers loaded the grain in sacks, estimating the whole at fifty ardebs. "You shall have ten dirhams for brokerage on each ardeb sold for a hundred," said the young man, "I pray you collect the whole of the money and keep it carefully by you till I come for it. As the whole price will be five thousand dirhams, you will keep five hundred and the other four thousand five hundred will be for me. When I have finished my other business I will come and take the money." Kissing his hands, I answered: "Be it as you desire!" and went my way.

That day I gained a thousand dirhams in brokerage, five hundred from the seller and five hundred from the buyers, making that total profit of twenty per cent., which is usual with us.

The young man came to me in a month and asked where his money was. I told him that it was ready for him, put up in a bag; and he begged me to keep it a while longer. At the end of another month he returned and asked for his money. I made him the same answer and added: "Will you not this time so far honour my house as to come in and eat a little?" But he refused and went away, again begging me to keep the money until his other business were completed.

I guarded the money carefully until at the end of another month he came to my shop, saying: "This evening I will be passing and will take the money." I got the sum ready for him and waited till late at night, but it was a month before he came again. As I waited I could not help saying to myself: "How trusting is this youth. Since I have been a broker among the Khans and markets I have never seen a youth so trusting." At last he came to me again mounted as ever upon his ass and very richly dressed. He was quite as beautiful as the full moon, his face was always bright and fresh as if he had just come from the bath, and there was a black beauty spot at the corner of his lips as if it had been a drop of dark amber. He was like the boy in the song:

The boy and girl have set
Their slender lips and kissed,
The gold procession of the sun has met
The silver journey of the moon,
The silver journey of the moon
Is lost within a crimson sunset mist.

When I saw him I kissed his hands and called down on him all the blessings of Allah. "I hope, my lord," I said, "that you will take your money this time." "Be patient a little longer," he answered. "When I have concluded all my business I will come back for the money." Then he departed.

Feeling sure that he would again be absent for some time, I ventured his money in a twenty per cent. investment as is the custom in our country and cleared my profit with ease. "By Allah," I said to myself, "when the youth comes back I must certainly entertain him sumptuously, for through him I am in some sort becoming a rich man."

A year passed away in these visits and delays and then he came again, dressed more sumptuously than ever and mounted upon his mettlesome white ass.

I begged him to honour my house by becoming its guest and he laughingly accepted on the understanding that I should spend only his own money on his entertainment. I laughed also and consented. When I had conducted him into the house and seated him upon a seat of honour, I ran to the market and bought all sorts of meats and drinks with everything suitable to a banquet. I set the table and begged him in God's name to fall to. He did so, and all the time to my great surprise ate with his left hand. When we had finished he washed his left hand without the help of his right, and, after I had served him with a napkin, we began to talk.

At last I plucked up courage to say: "My lord, I pray you relieve me of a great anxiety. Why did you eat with your left hand? Has your right met, by any chance, with some accident?" The young man answered with these lines:—

If you would ask the tempest rack
If he is wet,
Then ask if I am sad.

If you would ask the blackest jet
Why he's not black,
Then ask me why I'm glad.

So saying, he took his right arm from the folds of his robe and I saw that the hand was cut off at the wrist. Seeing my astonishment, he said: "You need not be surprised at this, only I beg you not to think that I ate with my left hand with any thought of incivility towards you. As you see, I had to do so. The reason for the cutting off of my right hand was indeed a strange one." "What was it?" I asked, and he told me the following tale.

I was born in Baghdad where my father was one of the principal merchants in the city. Ever since I grew up I listened to accounts given of the marvels of the land of Egypt by such travellers, pilgrims and merchants as stopped at my father's house. Until the old man died I brooded in secret on what I had heard; but as soon as I became my own master, I realised all the money that I could, and, laying it out in fabrics of Baghdad and Mosul and other merchandise of price, left my home with what I had bought. Allah had decreed that I should arrive in safety and in health at this fine city of Cairo.

Here the young man burst out weeping and recited these lines:—

The blind man still escapes the ditch
In which the seeing stumble,
The poor inhuman mad thing, which
You pity for his mumble,
Escapes the just too clever speech
Which makes the statesman tumble
To a hell where silence equals pitch,
Dispraise, the volcan's rumble:
So I, who had a lofty mind,
Became the meanest of mankind.

When he had mournfully spoken this, he continued his tale.

I entered Cairo and, putting up at the khan Al-Masrur, loaded the goods from my camels in a storehouse which I hired. I gave my servant money to buy food with, and, after sleeping a little, went to recreate myself in the street called Bayn al-Kasrayn. Then I returned to the khan where I passed the night.

When I woke in the morning I opened up my goods and setting a selection of them on the shoulders of my slaves, went out towards the market to see how business was. I found the principal trading-quarter to be a lofty building surrounded by doors, all the available space being taken up by either shops or fountains. This is called the exchange of Jaharkas; and, as you know, it is the headquarters of the brokers.

I had let the brokers know of my coming so that they lost no time in dividing up my goods and taking the rare fabrics round to the principal buyers. Soon they returned and told me that the price which they could get would not cover my cost price and the porterage from Baghdad. I was considering what to do when the chief broker said to me: "I know how you can get a profit on your goods. You have only to adopt the method of all the other merchants who deal here. Sell your goods on credit for a fixed period to the shop-keepers on a contract drawn up by a notary and duly witnessed. Then every Thursday and every Monday you can collect your profit and make two dirhams or even more on each one you have spent. Also, while you are waiting, you can pleasantly visit about Cairo and admire the beautiful Nile."

"That is an excellent plan," I said, and at once took the brokers and advertisers back with me to the khan Al-Masrur and gave them all my goods to take to the exchange. Then I sold all I had in detail to the shopkeepers, having contracts drawn up by the notary of the exchange.

After this I returned to the khan and lived idly, stinting myself for nothing. Every day I breakfasted sumptuously; and there was always on my table wine, excellent mutton, and all kinds of sweetmeats and jams. For a month I lived in this pleasant way until the day came round for me to take my first profit. Thenceforward I went regularly every Monday and Thursday to the shop of one of my retailers and waited there while a broker made a tour of all the shops and brought me back my money.

Sometimes I would choose one shop, sometimes another. It happened one day (when I had bathed, rested, eaten a chicken, drunk some glasses of wine, washed my hands, and perfumed myself with aromatic essences), that I came to the exchange of Jaharkas and sat down in the shop of a certain silk merchant whose name was Badreddin Al-Bostani. He received me well and we started chatting together.

While we were doing so a woman whose head was covered with a blue silk veil came into the shop to buy fabrics and sat down on a stool by my side. Her light face veil was a little awry letting delicate wafts of scent escape from it. Her beauty at once began to attack my reason and the victory was complete when she pushed aside her veil a little and I saw the darkness of her eyes. When she had greeted Badreddin and he her, he began to show her every kind of expensive stuff, and I sat watching, listening to the sweetness of her voice, and feeling the little hand of love close more and more firmly about my heart.

She looked at several pieces and, not finding anything beautiful enough, she asked Badreddin if he had by any chance a length of white silk embroidered with threads of pure gold which she needed for the making of a dress. Badreddin went to the back of the shop and, opening a chest, took from beneath many other rolls of silk a piece just such as she had desired. He opened it out before her and she, finding it exactly suitable, said: "I have not the money with me. Give it to me now and when I reach home I will send payment." "This time, Madam, I am not able to do that," answered the merchant, "because the stuff does not belong to me, but to this traveller, and I am under a bond to pay him his profit today." Angrily the lady said: "Wretch, have you forgotten that it is my custom always to buy very expensive goods from you and to give you such a profit as you would never dare ask for yourself? Do you not know that I never delay a moment in sending you the money?" "That is true, lady," he replied, "but today I am obliged to ask for cash on the spot." At these words she threw the silk back in his arms, saying: "You are all alike in this market; you cannot discriminate between people!" Then she rose in a passion of anger and departed.

I felt that my heart was going with her, so I rose and, bowing, called after her: "Dear mistress, have pity; be good enough to come back and vouchsafe me a word or two!" She turned to me with a little smile, and said: "I will come back into the shop, but only for your sake."

When she had sat down facing me I asked Badreddin his cost price for the silk. "Eleven hundred dirhams," he answered. "Very well," I said, "I will give you a receipt allowing you an extra hundred for profit." I wrote him the receipt and taking up the silk of gold gave it to the lady, saying: "Take it and pay me when you will. I am always to be found on

Monday and Thursday at one of the shops in the market. Further, if you will do me the honour to accept the silk as a gift, I shall be more happy still.'' She answered me jestingly: ''May Allah overwhelm you with his favours! May you come to possess all I have and be my master! Also Allah favour this wish of mine!'' ''Accept the silk then, Madam!'' I exclaimed. ''It will not be the only piece. But grant me as a suppliant to see your face!''

She lifted the light veil which hid all her face below the eyes, and the single glance which I was able to take threw me into a cauldron of love, tore all the passion which lay about my heart, and robbed me of my power of thought. In an instant she lowered the veil, took the silk, saying: ''Master let your absence not be long, lest I die!'' and departed.

I was left alone with the merchant until nightfall, sitting there as one mad, eaten with the wonderful folly of a sudden passion, and questioning him all the time about the lady. Before I rose to go he had told me that she was very rich, the heiress of a well-known emir who had recently died.

When I got back to the khan Al-Masrur, my servants offered me food, but I could eat nothing. I lay awake all night and rising at dawn put on the most beautiful robe I had, drank some wine, ate a little, and returned to the shop. Hardly had I sat down in my accustomed place and begun to talk with Badreddin when the girl came again, this time accompanied by a young slave. She sat down and greeted me without taking the least notice of the merchant. Then in a voice as sweet as running water, she said: ''Send someone with me for the twelve hundred dirhams.'' ''There is no hurry,'' I answered. ''How generous you are!'' she exclaimed. ''Still, you must not let me be the cause of loss to you." On this she gave me the price with her own hand and we talked together until I was emboldened to sigh the greatness of my passion to her. When she understood how eagerly I desired that we should come together, she rose and left the shop with a few words of ordinary and polite leave-taking. Unable to control myself I also left the shop, my heart beating violently in love for her, and followed at a respectful distance until we came out beyond the market. Suddenly I lost sight of her; but at the same moment a young girl closely veiled came up to me, and said: "My lord, I pray you come to my mistress who wishes to speak to you." As I did not know the girl, I said: "I am acquainted with no one in this part." "Do you forget so quickly?" she asked. "Do you not recall the slave who was with a lady in the silk shop half-an-hour ago?" Hearing this, I walked with her until I saw her mistress at the corner of the Street of the Money Changers. She came quickly to my side and led me into the angle of a wall, saying: "Dear one, you have filled all my mind and over-flowed my heart with love. Since the hour I saw you I have not tasted sleep, I have not eaten and I have not drunken!" "All these misfortunes and more have happened to me," I said, "but my present bliss disarms the least complaint." "Tell me, sweetheart," she asked, "shall it be at my house or at yours?" "I am a stranger," I answered, "I have no lodging but the khan, and that is too populous for our sweet business. If you have sufficient confidence in my love, I pray you accept me as a guest in your own house and my happiness will be complete!" "It shall be so," she relied, "but not tonight, for it is Thursday. To-morrow, after the midday prayer, mount an ass and make for the Habbaniyah quarter, and there inquire for the house of the syndic Barakat, known as Abu Shamah. That is where I live. Do not fail me, for I shall be dying of impatience till you come.''

I made my way back joyfully to the khan and passed another sleepless night. At dawn I put on new clothes, scented myself with a selection of the most expensive perfumes, and, knotting fifty gold dinars in a handkerchief, walked to the Bab Zawilah gate and hired a donkey there. I told the boy to lead me to the Habbaniyah quarter, and in a very short time we reached it and paused in a street known as Darb al-Munakkari. I told the boy to find the house of the nakib Abu Shamah, and he returned in a few minutes with the address. I got down from the donkey and made him go before to show me the house. When we had reached the door I gave him a golden quarter dinar and dismissed him, saying: ''Come for me to-morrow morning.'' He kissed the coin and made off, promising to return at the appointed hour.

The door was opened to my knocking by two little girls, virgins with breasts as round as small full moons, who said: ''Enter, my lord; our mistress is impatient for your coming. She has not slept all night because of her desire for you!'' I went into the courtyard and saw in front of me a wonderful building with seven doors. The front of it was pierced with windows which looked onto a great garden, filled with coloured and tasting fruit trees. These were washed by little silver streams and the birds sang in them. The house itself was built of white marble, at once so fine that it seemed almost wind-blown and so bright that the visitor might see his face in it. It was decorated with all kinds of inscriptions and pictures and was filled with cunningly wrought furniture. The floors were a vast mosiac of coloured marble, and, in the middle of the central hall, was a fountain basin all inlaid with pearls. A heavy carpet lay beside the fountain and the walls were covered with silks of as many colours as there are flowers in Spring. Couches stood about the hall; and hardly had I sat down on one of them . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Twenty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that the merchant went on with his tale to the Christian broker of Cairo, who, in his turn, reproduced it for the sultan of that city of China, in the following words:—

I saw the sweet girl coming towards me, aglitter with pearls, her face shining, her eyes lengthened with kohl. Smiling, she pressed me to her breast and crushed her mouth to mine sweetly kissing my lips. I did the same to her and then: "Is it really you?" she asked. "It is your slave," I answered. "O joyous day, O delight!" she murmured, "By Allah, I am blind with my passion for you! I cannot eat or drink." "It is so with me," I answered, and was thrown into such happy confusion by so sweet a greeting that I hung my head down as we talked together.

A cloth was spread before us with rich roasts, stuffed chickens, and pastries of every kind. We ate until we were more than satisfied; my lady putting little bits of the food into my mouth with her own fingers and pressing me on with the most exciting terms. When we had washed our hands in a copper basin and perfumed ourselves with roses, we sat down again side by side and she said these lines to me:—

I would have knit my eyes up with my heart,
A black and purple carpet for your feet,
And rent the damask of my cheeks apart
To spread cool beds of roses, and entreat
Your weary body; but I did not know
That you would come, or that I loved you so.

Then she told me all the secrets of her heart and I told her mine; so that we loved each other all the more dearly. Soon we began playing with each other, adding a thousand caresses to a thousand until nightfall. When the lamps were lit, the slaves again brought us abundant food and drink and we passed the cup from one to the other until midnight. Then we lay down and moved or were still in each other's arms until morning. There had never been a night like that in all my life.

In the morning I rose, and, slipping the handkerchief which held the fifty gold pieces under the pillow of the bed, took leave of my mistress and was about to depart. But she wept and said: "When shall I look on your darling face again?" "I will come tonight," I answered. When I went out I found the donkey-boy with his ass who conducted me to the khan Al-Masrur, where I dismounted and gave him a gold half-dinar, saying: "Return this evening at sunset." "Your word is law," he said and made off.

I entered the khan and, after breaking my fast, left it again to collect some of the money that was due to me. Coming back with my profits, I had the cook prepare an exquisite grilled sheep which I gave, with an abundance of sweet stuffs, to a porter with instructions to carry all to the lady's house. I went on regulating my business affairs until the evening and, when the donkey-boy came for me, set out, carrying another fifty gold dinars in a handkerchief.

I found the house washed and garnished for my reception; with all the kitchen things highly polished, torches and lamps alight upon the walls, the meat prepared and the wine poured. As soon as she saw me, my mistress threw herself into my arms, caressing me and saying: "Ah, how I desire you!" We ate to satiety and then, when the cloth was drawn, drank wine and cracked almonds, nuts, and pistachios until midnight. We stayed together until the morning; I rose at dawn, and, leaving my packet of dinars beneath the pillow, left the house. I found the ass waiting for me with his driver and soon came to the khan where I lay down to sleep. In the evening I set about preparations for dinner. I had a dish of rice stewed with butter and garnished with nuts and almonds, a dish of fried artichokes, and many another thing besides. These I sent, with an abundance of fruits and flowers and nuts, to the house of my lady and soon after mounted the ass and made my own way thither. We ate and drank and loved until the morning: at sunrise I got up, and, leaving a third handkerchief filled with gold below the pillow, returned to my khan.

Things went on like this day after day until one fine morning I found that I was ruined; I had not a single dirham, much less a dinar, in all the world. I did not know what to say and, considering that this chance was the direct work of the devil, I recited these lines:—

As the sun yellows before setting,
So man, who sinks to his forgetting,
Shines in his dying;
And as the death-struck bird sings loudest,
So a man's soul is puffed and proudest
Poised for its flying.

Yet better die and be as nothing
Than with scurfed feet and filthy clothing
Crawl the hot streets, a thing of loathing
To honest men;
Or hear the friend you loved through joy and tears
Greet the recital of your name with jeers
Even before your first white hair appears,
Even before then.

Not knowing what to do and all my mind being in a turmoil, I left the khan to walk a little in the streets and happened at last into the square of Bayn Al-Kasrayn near the Zawilah gate. It was a fair day and the square was one mass of people, swaying so thick together that I found myself pressed heavily against a horse-soldier. My hand being just on a level with his pocket, I was able to feel that it contained a little hard packet. With a quick movement I thrust my hand into the pocket and drew out its contents, but I had not been dexterous enough to escape my victim's notice. The soldier, feeling his pocket lightened, explored it with his hand and found that he had been robbed. Turning round in fury, he gave me a violent blow on the head with his mace, so that I fell to the ground. At once I was surrounded by a crowd, some of whom prevented the soldier from moving by catching at his horse's bridle. "Shame," they cried, "to strike an unarmed man because he has jostled you!" "Nothing of the sort," answered the soldier, "the man is a thief!'' My wits were beginning to clear so that I heard the people saying: ''He is too excellent and distinguished a youth ever to be a robber!'' Then there was a great babble and movement in the crowd, some saying that I had stolen and some saying that I had not. Quarrels, discussions, and explanations were bandied over my head, and I was just on the point of being drawn off and lost in the crowd when, as ill-luck would have it, the wali and his guard passed by on their way from the Zawilah gate. The wali questioned the soldier as to what had happened, and the man answered: ''By Allah, O emir, this fellow is a thief. I had in my pocket a blue purse containing twenty dinars of gold; he lifted it when the crowd jostled us together.'' ''Did anyone see the deed?'' asked the wali and, when the soldier replied that none had, he called to his chief of police: ''Seize that man and search him!'' The chief did so, since the protection of Allah had been removed from me, and stripping off all my clothes came upon the blue purse. The wali took the purse, counted the money and found that it tallied exactly with the soldier's claim.

The emir called angrily to his people to bring me before him. ''Tell me the truth, young man,'' he said, ''do you confess that you stole the purse?'' I stood there ashamed with hanging head, and, reflecting that whatever I said it would be a bad business for me, answered that I had stolen it. On this the wali called witnesses and made me repeat my statement. The witnesses stood by Bab Zawilah and I confessed.

Straightway the wali ordered me to have my hands cut off; the executioner had cut off the right one and was turning to the other, when the soldier interceded with the wali for me and he spared me the rest of my punishment. Some of the good folk who stood around gave me wine to drink to compensate for the great quantity of blood which I had lost and my consequent weakness. The soldier did more than this. He put the purse into my hand saying: "You are too fine a youth to be a robber, my friend." I accepted the purse with these words:—

O chief
Of friends, I am no thief;
There are
Who threw me from my car,
Debate
Of Destiny and Fate.
Not I
Rained arrows from the sky;
But He
Transfixed unhappy me.

The soldier left me after having made me accept the purse; and I, binding my wrist with a handkerchief and hiding it in my sleeve, wandered away pale and sorrowful from that place.

Not knowing anywhere else to go, I walked to my mistress's house and entering, threw myself on the bed in a state of exhaustion. Seeing the state I was in, my dear one asked me what the matter was and why my usual colour and mien were so changed. "I have a headache and am not at all well," I answered. Very sadly she said: "Master, do not burn my heart in this way. Sit up, I beg you, and tell me what has happened to you today. I can read many and terrible things in your face." "Spare me the pain of answering," I replied. On this she began to weep, saying: "Ah, I see what has happened; I have nothing more to give you now; you are tired of me; you do not love me any longer.'' So saying, she wept and sighed until nightfall, pausing every now and then to ask me questions, to which I could give her no answer. At twilight we were served with food as was our custom, but I refused it for shame that I should have to eat with my left hand, and for fear that she should ask me the cause. ''I do not want to eat just now,'' I said. ''I can see that, my dear,'' she answered, ''tell me what has happened to you today and why you are so weak and miserable.'' ''I will tell you presently,'' I said. ''Little by little and slowly.'' On this her manner changed to one more sprightly and, stretching out a cup to me, she begged me: ''Drink of that juice which banishes all sorrow, in which all thoughts that are not happy ones must drown. When you have drunk you will be able to tell me of your sorrow.'' ''If you insist,'' said I, ''give me to drink with your own hand.'' She brought the cup to my lips and tilting it slowly let me drink of it; then filling it anew she held it out again. This time, by an effort of will, I stretched out my left hand and took the cup myself; but even so I could not restrain my tears. I said:—

''His fingers can bemuse us with a touch;
The man who sees too far or hears too much
He with a breath subdues.
He plucks our reason as we pluck a hair
And then, that erring man may be aware,
The silly brain renews.''

When I had finished intoning, I sobbed as if my heart would break; and at my tears my dear friend sobbed also, taking my head between her hands and weeping over it. ''For pity's sake, tell me why you weep,'' she said, ''you are breaking my heart. And tell me why you took the cup with your left hand." "I have an abscess on my right," I answered. "Let me see it," she said, "I will cut it for you and that will give you relief." "It is not ready for that," I replied. "Do not insist, for I am quite resolved not to show you my hand." On this I drank off the cup of wine, and went on emptying it as often as she filled it until I was quite drunk. I stretched myself out where I was and went fast asleep.

She took advantage of my slumbers to uncover my right arm and saw at once that I had lost the hand; then, searching me, she found the blue purse with the gold in it. When she recognised the full extent of my wretchedness, she fell into a boundless melancholy, a depth of grief such as no one on the earth has felt before.

When I woke in the morning I saw that she had already prepared food for me; four boiled chickens on a dish, with chicken broth, and wine in abundance. She brought these to me and I broke my fast. After this, I wished to take my leave and go away, but she stopped me and asked my destination. "I am going to a place," I answered, "where I can get relief and distraction from my miseries." "Rather stay here," she said, sitting down and regarding me for a long time. At last she spoke: "My friend, you were very foolish. Your love for me has taken away your wits, I see that well; and you have ruined yourself because of me. Further I do not find it hard to guess that it is on account of me that you have lost your hand. So now I swear, and Allah is my witness, that never more will I be separated from you or let you out of my sight. You will soon see that I am telling you the truth. I wish us to be married at once with all the rites of the law."

She sent for witnesses and, when they came, she said: "I wish you to witness my marriage with this young man. Write out my contract with him, and above all bear testimony that I have already received my marriage portion from him." The witnesses wrote out our marriage contract, and my wife addressed these words to them: "I bid you attest that all the riches which belong to me, both in that chest which you see and in every other place, belong from this moment to my husband." The witnesses took note of her declaration and my acceptation and then went away with their fees.

When we were alone, my bride took me by the hand and led me to a press which she opened, and disclosing a great chest threw back its lid, saying: "See what is within." I looked inside and saw that it was entirely filled with little packets made from handkerchiefs. "All these are yours," said my wife. "Each time you left a handkerchief with fifty dinars inside it, I shut it away in this chest and kept it for you. Now take back what you gave. Allah wrote in your destiny that all this should be preserved for you; today He protects you with the shadow of His hand, and has made me the instrument to fulfil all His words towards you. But you have lost your right hand because of me and for that I could not even pay you with my life. Nay, though I gave my soul in exchange for all your love and devotion, yet would you be the loser. Take hold of your inheritance, my love." To please her I bought a new chest and transferred to it, one by one, all the packets of money. Thus my money was returned to me, my heart was filled with joy once more, and all my grieving vanished like a shadow.

I took her in my arms and we sat down together, talking and drinking gaily for a long time. With sweet well-chosen words she excused herself for having given me, as she said, so little, when I had given so much. At last, wishing to put a crown on what she had done for me, she rose up, and made over to me by deed of gift, written and sealed by her own hand before witnesses, all that she had of precious garments, jewels, properties, buildings and lands.

That night, for all the love we showered on one another, she went to sleep in a depth of sadness, because of the troubles which she deemed had fallen upon me through her fault, and which at last she had made me describe to her in full.

Thenceforward she so plagued herself with lamentation on my account that, by the end of the month, she had fallen ill of a melancholia which, increasing day by day, killed her at the end of the second month, so that she passed to be one of the elect in Paradise.

I placed her in the earth with every circumstance of mourning and every expensive rite which is allowed. When I came back from the burial ground and entered the house, I carefully went over each article of my inheritance. I found that she had left me great riches, made up of every sort of property, including great barns filled with sesame. It was that sesame which I bade you sell for me, good sir, and for which I wished you to accept so inconsiderable a brokerage.

As for my continued absences which so astonished you, they are explained by the fact that I had to realise on all the other properties that she had left me. It is only today that I have received the last of my money.

I beg you not to refuse me the opportunity of doing you a slight favour, friend, who have so well entertained and feasted me in your house. I wish you to accept all the money which you have been keeping for me, the proceeds of the sesame.

Such is my story: such the reason why I eat with my left hand.

Then, O powerful King, I said to the young man: "Indeed you overwhelm me with your favours!" "That is nothing," he answered, "moreover I have another thing to ask. Would you be willing, O broker, to join yourself to me and accompany me to Baghdad in the country of my birth? I have made great purchases of Alexandrine and Cairene goods which I hope to sell in Baghdad for a great profit. Will you come to be my companion upon the way, and to share the proceeds of my venture?" "So grateful a desire is an order to me," said I; and fixed the end of the month for our departure. While waiting, I realised all my property without loss of a single dirham, and with the money purchased a great quantity of merchandise for trade. In brief, the youth and I reached Baghdad and after taking a magnificent return for all our goods, set out once more and journeyed for this land of yours, O King of all the ages.

Having sold here, the youth did not tarry but set out again for Egypt. I was on the point of starting to rejoin him when, last night, I became mixed up in the affair of the hunchback owing to my ignorance of the country. For you must know that I am but a stranger travelling on business.

That, O King, is the story which I think more singular than the one concerning the hunchback.

"Not so," answered the King, "I do not find it nearly so strange as the other, O broker. I am going to have you all hanged on the spot for the crime which you have committed on the person of my jester, this poor dead hunchback."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Twenty-seventh Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that when the king of China said: "I am going to hang you all," the steward came forward and bowed to the ground saying: "If you will allow me, I will tell you of an adventure which happened to me quite recently and which is both more marvellous and more astonishing in every way than the story of the hunchback. If you agree with this estimate of the tale when you have heard me, I pray that you will spare us all." "Be it so," said the king of China. "Let us hear this thing." Then said the other:

THE TALE OF THE STEWARD

Know, O King of the ages and of time, that I was asked last night to a marriage feast where were gathered many doctors of the law and sages learned in the Sacred Books. When the perfection of the Koran had been accomplished, the cloth was laid and all manner of meats and necessary things were brought. Among other succulencies was a dish with garlic called *rozbaja,* which has a great reputation and is exceedingly delicious if the rice, which is the basis of it, be cooked to a turn, and both the garlic and the other aromatic seasonings be apportioned with nicety. We guests began to eat with great appetite, except one, who resolutely refused to touch this particular dish. When we begged him to have just a mouthful he would not do so. We redoubled our invitations, but he said: "I beg you not to press me in this manner. I was quite sufficiently punished the one time I had the misfortune to taste that dish." Then he recited this stanza:

If you would give your friend the slip,
For God's sake don't be clever;
Just kick him basis over tip
And silence him for ever.

We did not wish to insist further, but we could not help asking him: "What reason can there be for refusing to eat this delicious *rozbaja?*" "I have made an oath," he said, "never to eat *rozbaja* without washing my hands forty times with soda, forty times with potash, and forty times with soap; a hundred and twenty times in all." Generously the master of the house ordered his slaves to bring water and the other necessary things; so that the guest washed his hands the requisite number of times and then sat down again. But it was an unwilling, trembling, hesitating hand that he put out to the common dish of which we were all eating. We were astonished, first by the timid way in which he ate, and second and more especially by the appearance of his hand, which lacked a thumb. "Allah be good to you," we said, "how came you to lose your thumb? Were you born so, or have you met with an accident?" "Brothers," he answered, "you have not seen all. It is two thumbs and not one that I have lost. Also there are only four toes apiece upon my feet. Look for yourselves!" With that he showed us his other hand and both his feet, so that we saw that what he said was true. In our astonishment, we could not help saying: "Our curiosity is grown very great and we are most desirous to learn how you came to lose your two thumbs and your two big toes, and the reason why you have washed your hands a hundred and twenty times." Then he told us this tale:

Know, all of you, that my father was one of the great merchants in the city of Baghdad, in the time of the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid. He was an experienced lover of good wines, of selected pleasure, and of stringed instruments; so that when he died he left no money at all. Nevertheless, as he was my father, I buried him according to his rank, entertaining my friends at funeral feasts in his honour, and mourning for many days and nights. At length I went to inspect his shop and, opening it, discovered that there was nothing there of any value, but rather that he had died heavily in debt. I interviewed his creditors and prevailed on them to give me time in which to repay them as much as I could. I set to work and, by shrewd buying and selling, managed to pay a small portion of the debts, week by week, with my profits. A time came when I had paid everything and had increased my original small capital.

One day, I was sitting in my shop, when I beheld a girl, the like of whom for beauty these eyes have never seen. She was dressed with unusual magnificence and rode upon a mule; in front of her walked a black eunuch and behind her another. At the entrance of the market she dismounted from her mule and entered, followed by one of her attendants. This eunuch kept on saying: "Mistress, for mercy's sake, do not enter the market in this way and show yourself to passers-by. Some terrible thing will come of it. Let us go hence." But she, paying no attention at all to his words, walked along looking at all the shops one after another. None was fairer or better kept than mine. She came over to me, followed by the eunuch and, sitting down in my shop, wished me peace. Never in all my life have I heard a voice so sweet or words so finely chosen. She put aside her veil so that I saw her face, and at once was thrown into a violent confusion of the heart. With my eyes still fastened to her face, I said:

She who is delicate
As the feather of a branch—
Tell her I supplicate
The reddest death to stanch
My woe.
She'll not say no.

She answered me with these lines:

I trained my heart for you,
And now he will not move
For any other love
However true.

A year or two I wasted
And then I drank it up,
Love which is love, a cup
You never tasted.

Then she said to me: "Young merchant, have you any beautiful fabrics to show me?" "Mistress," I answered, "your slave is poor, and has nothing worthy of your eyes. Have the patience to wait for a little, for it is early and the other merchants have not yet opened their shops. Soon I will go to them myself and buy all that you may need of precious stuffs." While we waited I chatted to her, and was drowned in the sea of her love, lost in the desert of the folly of my desire. When the other merchants opened their shops, I went and bought from them all that she had told me she needed; the price, for which I made myself responsible, coming to five thousand dirhams. I gave my purchases to her slaves, and at once she left me and went to where her other follower was holding the mule. She mounted at the market door and disappeared.

She had not asked me for any account, or said a word about the money she owed me and for which I had made myself responsible with the other merchants. She had not mentioned either her name or the place where she lived, and I, on my side, had been ashamed to ask her. There was I engaged to pay five thousand dirhams to the merchants at the end of the week: you can imagine that I had a mostly lively desire to see the girl again. Drunken with love I returned to my own house; my servants brought me food but I could scarcely eat for thinking on the sweet seduction of my lady; and when I tried to sleep, I could not.

For a week my existence was of this sort, but at the end of that time the merchants came to demand their money. As I had heard nothing of the sweet lady, I begged them to have patience and allow me another week in which to pay. Thy consented; and, as the second week was drawing to its close, I saw coming towards me, early one morning, her who was the picture of my thoughts mounted upon her mule and accompanied by two eunuchs and a body servant. She greeted me saying: "Master pray excuse me for having delayed a little in coming to pay you. Here is the money; fetch a money changer to check the gold pieces, and take over what is owing to you.'' A changer came and checked the money which one of the eunuchs gave him; then I put the sum away and went on talking to the young girl until the market was open and the merchants had come down to their shops. Then she said to me: ''I have need of such and such things. Go buy them for me.'' I bought all that she wanted on my own credit and gave the goods to her, after which she went away without saying a word on the money which she owed me.

When I saw her disappear I repented that I had had quite so much faith in her, because the goods I had bought would cost a thousand golden dinars. I said to myself: ''I understand nothing of this position or of her friendship towards me. She brings me money to the value of four hundred dinars and then takes away goods to the value of a thousand; if this goes on, not only will my ruin result, but a serious loss to these others, who, besides, will come down heavily on me when they find that they are out of pocket. I am afraid the girl is only an artful baggage who came on purpose to cozen me with her beauty; an adventuress, who first pillages poor unprotected shopkeepers and then laughs behind their backs. To think that I did not even take her address!''

For a whole month I remained a prey to such torturing thoughts, and at the end of that time, the other merchants came to claim their money. They insisted so vehemently upon immediate payment that I was obliged to contract to sell all that I had, my shop with its merchandise, my house, and all my goods. I was standing thus, filled with bitter thoughts, on the very edge of ruin, when I saw my lady coming again through the door at the top of the market and making her way towards me. Both my suspicions and my griefs fled at the sight of her and I forgot how unhappy I had been during her absence. She came up to me and began to talk in that golden jewel of a voice of hers, which said the sweetest things man ever heard. "Bring the scales and weigh the money which I have got for you," she said at last. And in truth, she handed over, not only all the money she owed for my purchases on her behalf but a great sum beside. When all was paid, she sat by my side and spoke with such freedom and friendship that I nearly died of joy. "Are you married?" she asked at last. "No," I answered, weeping, "I have never known a woman." "Why do you weep?" she said. "Because of something that just passed through my mind," I answered.

Leaving her, I drew her eunuch to the back of the shop and, giving him a handful of golden dinars, begged him to act as go-between in my love affair. He burst out laughing, and said: "She loves you a great deal more than you love her. She had no need to buy those fabrics; but only did so as an excuse to talk to you and make known her passion to you. Ask what you will of her, and I assure you that she will not deny you or be at all angry."

She was just getting up to take her leave, when she saw me passing the money to the eunuch. Interpreting the action, she came back and sat down in the shop smiling. Then said I to her: "Give your slave leave to ask you something; and pardon him beforehand for what he is going to say." I poured forth from my lips all the passion that was in my soul, and saw that it did not displease her. She answered gently: "This slave of mine will bring you my reply and tell you all my will. Do exactly as he tells you." Then she rose and left me.

When I had repaid the merchants all their money and their profit, I had nothing left to do but wait, and esteemed my own profit from the affair not great when time went by without bringing news of her. For days and nights I knew no sleep; at last the eunuch came again and I received him rapturously, begging for news. He told me that she had been ill for a few days. Then I said: "But who is she?" and he answered: "She is the foster child of our mistress Zobeida, favourite wife of Haroun Al-Rachid. The queen brought her up herself, loves her as her own child, and can refuse her nothing. The other day she asked our royal lady permission to go out, saying 'There is in my soul a desire to go for a walk.' Leave was given her; and, since then, not a day has passed without her going into the city and returning to the palace. Soon she became so experienced a buyer that Zobeida raised her to the position of cateress. It was on one of these expeditions that she saw you and, speaking about you on her return, begged the queen's leave to marry you. Our mistress said: 'I cannot give my sanction until I have seen the young man. If I find that he equals you in quality I shall marry him to you myself.' I have come to inform you that all our business now is to smuggle you into the palace. If we can manage that without attracting attention, you may be certain of your bride; but if you are discovered your head will answer for it. What do you say?" "Surely I will go with you," I answered, "you have but to tell me your plan." Then said the eunuch: "When night falls, make your way to the mosque which our lady Zobeida built on the Tigris; enter, pray and sleep; the rest will be in our hands." "I love, I honour, I obey!" I answered.

When evening came I walked to the mosque and, after saying my prayers, lay down for the night. At dawn I saw a boat coming towards the mosque filled with slaves and empty cases. The slaves unloaded the cases and, when they had stored them in the mosque, all save one, retired. The one who stayed I recognised as my lady's eunuch; and in a few moments I saw my lady herself, the attendant of Zobeida, coming up into the mosque from the land side. We embraced each other passionately, and sat talking for just as long as was needed for her to explain her plan. Then she put me into one of the chests and locked it; and in less time than it takes to tell, I was borne right into the women's quarters of the palace. There I was helped out of the box, and given costly robes and presents to the value of fifty thousand dirhams.

Presently I found myself surrounded by twenty other white slaves, all with tantalising beauties and all virgins, in the middle of whom was Zobeida, scarcely able to move because of the great weight of her splendid jewels and robes. When she was near me, the attendants divided into two ranks, so that I walked between and kissed the earth before the queen. She signed to me to sit down and began to question me about my ancestry and my present life. She was so pleased with my answers that she cried: "Praise be to Allah, I have not wasted my time in bringing up this girl since here is a husband worthy of her! Know, friend, that we look upon this lady of ours as a child of our own; she will make you a wife tender and submissive before Allah and before you." So I bowed and consented in due form to marry the lady.

The queen invited me to stay at the palace for ten days and, during all that time, I did not see my future bride again; but other damsels brought me food. At the end of the time necessary for preparing the marriage, Zobeida begged the Prince of Believers to give his leave; he did so, and added a gift of ten thousand dinars of gold for the lady. Then Zobeida sent for the kadi and witnesses and, when my marriage contract had been written out, the festival began. Sweet things of all sorts and the customary meats were prepared in abundance; all the harem ate and drank and the pieces were distributed throughout the city. It was only after the feasting had continued for ten days that the girl was taken to the hammam to be prepared according to the rite.

While she was there, a wonderful supper was spread before me and the other guests. Among roast chicken, pastries of every kind, delicious minces, and sweetmeats perfumed with musk and rose water, appeared so exquisitely confected a dish of *rozbaja* that it might have driven the wisest mad and disturbed the poise of the best balanced soul. As for me, hardly had it been set before me when, as Allah lived, I threw myself upon it and gorged. When I was full, I wiped my hands; but forgot to wash them. After the meal I rested quiet until full night came. Torches were lighted, singers and musicians performed before us, and all the women decked the bride several times in several lovely robes. At each circle that she made of the hall, every guest threw a gold piece into a dish which was borne after her. The whole palace was packed with guests who stayed until the end of the ceremony. At last I went into the chamber set apart for us; they brought the bride to me, removed her ceremonial raiment and left us. When I saw her beauty and knew that we were alone together in the room, I took her in my arms and could hardly believe for very joy that she was mine. But just at that moment, she smelt the garlic upon the hand with which I had eaten the *rozbaja,* and gave a great cry. The women ran in from all sides and found me trembling with emotion, quite ignorant of the reason for this disturbance. "What is it, sister?" they asked, and she replied: "For Allah's sake, rid me of this stupid fellow, whom once I thought to be a man of breeding." "How have I been silly?" I asked. "You are mad!" she replied, "why did you eat *rozbaja* and not wash your hands? As Allah lives, I wish nothing more to do with you since you are so silly, so ill-bred, and so criminal!" With these words she seized a whip that was beside her, and beat me over the back and buttocks so long and fiercely that I lost consciousness. Then she said to the other women: "Take him away and lead him to the governor of the city, so that the hand which ate *rozbaja* and was not washed may be cut off for a warning." These words brought me to my feet, crying: "There is no might nor mercy save in Allah! Is my hand to be cut off just because I ate *rozbaja* and did not wash? Who ever heard of such a thing!" The other women also interceded for me, saying: "Sister, do not punish him so severely this time. Pardon him, we beg of you!" At last she said: "Be it so: his hand shall not be cut off this time. Nevertheless, I must cut off something of his ends." Then she went out and left me alone.

At the end of ten days during which I did not see her, she came back saying: "O you whose face is blackened, am I so little in your eyes that you eat *rozbaja* and do not wash your hands?" Then she cried to her women: "Bind his arms and legs!" and when they had done so, she took a very sharp razor and cut off both my thumbs and my big toes. That is why, good friends, you see me as I am.

I fainted away, and she stopped my bleeding with applications of powdered aromatic roots. When I recovered consciousness, I said in a loud voice: "I will never eat *rozbaja* without first washing my hands forty times with potash, forty times with soda, and forty times with soap." She made me repeat these words in the form of an oath to the effect that I could never eat *rozbaja* without doing as you have seen me do.

So, my friends, when you all pressed me to eat the dish at this feast, I changed colour, my cheeks turned sallow, and I said to myself: "This is that *rozbaja* which lost me my thumbs," and, when you forced me to eat, I was obliged by my oath to wash as I did.

So I, O King of the ages (continued the steward), said to the young merchant of Baghdad while all the others listened: "What afterwards happened between you and your wife?" He answered:

When I took that oath, her heart was softened towards me and she pardoned me. I took her and lay with her, and for a long time we lived together in the palace; but at last she said: "No one in the court knows what has happened between us; no man but you has ever entered the women's quarter of this palace and it was only thanks to our dearest queen that you accomplished the entry." Then she gave me fifty thousand dinars in gold, saying: "Take this money and buy some great and beautiful dwelling for us where we may live together."

So I went forth and bought a magnificent house to which I transported all my wife's riches; all the gifts that had been given to her, the jewels, the fair silks, and the costly furniture. She joined me and we lived together in great happiness and contentment.

But at the end of a year Allah took my wife away; and I did not marry again, preferring rather to see the world. I sold all my belongings and left Baghdad.

Since then I have travelled with my money and, as you see, have come even as far as this city.

That, O King of time, went on the steward, is the story of the young Baghdad merchant. As for the rest, after the feast was finished we went homewards; and it was then that that happened to me with the hunchback of which you have heard.

Such is the tale which I believe to be more astonishing than the adventure of the hunchback.

Peace be with you.

"You are mistaken," said the King of China, "it is not in any way more astonishing than the adventure of the hunchback; on the contrary, the adventure of the hunchback is considerably more marvellous than it. There is nothing for it but to hang every one of you."

But at that moment the Jewish doctor came forward and kissed the earth saying: "King of time, I have a tale to tell you which is without doubt infinitely more extraordinary than the two which you have just heard or the adventure of the hunchback."

"Tell us," said the King of China, "for I am all impatience."

AND THE JEWISH DOCTOR SAID:

THE TALE OF THE JEWISH DOCTOR

MY TALE concerns a most extraordinary thing which happened to me in my youth. I was studying medicine and other forms of science in the city of Damascus. When I had learnt my trade I went into practice and earned a fair livelihood.

One day, a slave from the house of the governor of Damascus came to me and, bidding me follow, led me to the governor's palace. There, in the middle of a great hall, I saw a bed of cedar-wood plated with gold, on which the most beautiful young man in all the world lay sick. Standing at his bedside I wished him a speedy return to health, but he answered me only with a movement of his eyes, so I said: "Give me your hand, my lord." Then he held out his left hand, a circumstance which so astonished me that I could not help considering how a youth with such a noble air of breeding could be so impolite. Nevertheless I felt his pulse and wrote him a prescription. When I had visited him daily for ten days, he recovered and rose from his bed; so I prescribed, as a completion of his cure, that he should take a bath at the hammam and then return to sleep.

As a tribute to my skill, the governor of Damascus clothed me in a rich robe of honour and appointed me to be both his private physician and chief doctor of the Damascus hospital. The young man, who had always given me his left hand throughout his illness, begged me to accompany him to the bath. When the slaves of the hammam, which had been specially reserved for the youth so that no one else was allowed to enter, had undressed him, taken away his clothes, and set out others ready for him, I was able to see, during the time of his nakedness, that his right hand was missing. This sight both surprised and grieved me; and I was the more perturbed when I saw the marks of whips all over his body. Turning to me, he said; "O doctor of this age, let not my state cause you any surprise, for I intend to tell you, when we have left the bath, the reason of all this. It makes a truly remarkable story."

Leaving the hammam we returned to the palace, and sat down to rest before our evening meal. "Would you not prefer to go into the upper chamber?" asked the young man. "Certainly," I answered. So he ordered the cooks to spit a sheep and roast it for us, and to have the meal laid in the upper chamber. Soon the slaves brought us the roast sheep and every kind of fruit; and when we sat down to eat, the young man used his left hand all the time. "Now tell me your story," said I, and the youth answered: "Chief physician of these hundred years, listen and I will tell you."

I was born in Mosul where my family were considered among the most important people of the city. On his death, my grandfather left ten sons of whom my father was the eldest; by the time he died all ten sons were married, but only to my father had a child been vouchsafed. My uncles, being childless themselves, held me in great affection and were pleased at all times to have me of their company.

One day I went with my father to the great mosque of Mosul to make the Friday prayer; and when the ceremony was over, all the congregation departed except my father and my uncles. These sat down on a great rug and began to talk of voyages and the marvels of strange countries and of great cities far away. Especially did they speak of Egypt and the city of Cairo; reciting the wonderful stories of travellers who had visited that country and reported it to be the most beautiful in the world. The poets, they said, had been no more than right in singing the beauties of that land and of her river the fair Nile. One has written:

Ah, Euphrates, ah, Euphrates,
Silver river men put first,
How can an Egyptian sate his
Native-born Egyptian thirst
Save in the smile
Of the mild Nile?

My uncles detailed the marvels of Egypt. One spoke of her golden dust, her women, her light sweet waters, and her air passing the scent of aloe-wood. Another praised the flowers and islands of the Nile, and the sun shining like swords on the green-banked Abyssinian Pond, a third delighted to recall the Night of Nile-full and the Garden at eventide. And all spoke with such warm eloquence that, when they ceased talking and went their way, I remained dreaming and in a trance, my soul being unable to detach itself from the fair images which had been born in my mind. When I reached home I could not sleep; for days I lost appetite and refused to eat or drink.

A few days later I heard that my uncles had made preparations for a voyage to Egypt, and I so wrought on my father with supplications and tears that he allowed me to accompany them and even bought merchandise for me to trade on the journey. He advised my uncles, however, not to take me as far as Egypt, but to leave me at Damascus. When all was ready I bade farewell to my father and the caravan set out from Mosul.

First we came to Aleppo where we tarried for a few days, and then went forwards towards Damascus which we reached safely in the fullness of time.

We found the city of Damascus a place set in the midst of gardens with running waters, trees, fruits, and birds in excess of all other places. But especially did it abound in every colour and taste of delightful fruits.

We put up in one of the khans, and my uncles stayed in the city until they had sold all their goods from Mosul and bought Damascus wares to sell in Cairo. After they had traded my goods at a profit of five dirhams on one, to my great delight, they left me alone in Damascus and set out for Egypt. I rented a beautiful house, a thing of marvel such as the tongue of man might not describe, paying two dinars a month in gold for it. There I lived in pleasant extravagance; satisfying all my senses, eating and drinking of the best, until I had considerably encroached on my fortune.

One day, as I sat taking the air at the door of my house, an expensively dressed girl approached, the like of whose elegance I had never seen in my life before. I sprang to my feet and invited her to honour my house with her presence; an invitation which she accepted in the best of gentle humours. When she was in the house I shut the door behind us, and, taking her joyfully in my arms, carried her into the central hall. There she took off her veil and appeared in all her beauty; so that I fell into a complete madness of love for her.

I ran about, and, spreading a cloth, covered it with rich meats, fruits of choice, and all else that is suitable on such an occasion. We ate and sported together, and then drank until we were very pleasantly drunk. I took her, and we passed a night together such as was worthy to be enshrined among the historical love nights of the world. Determined that everything should be in keeping, I offered her ten gold dinars in the morning; but she refused them haughtily, saying that she would never accept anything from me. "Besides, my dear," she continued, "in three days' time I will visit you again at twilight; and, as it is I who do the inviting, I insist on bearing the expense. Take this money, and with it prepare a feast like yesterday's." She forced me to accept ten golden dinars and then left me, taking my soul along with her.

But in three days she came again dressed more gloriously than before, and I do not think that human tongue could describe the gold and embroidered fabrics and silks from which her beauty shone. I had prepared all as before, without sparing expense, so that we were able to sit down at once to eat and drink as we had done the last time, and we lay together until the morning.

She came a third time after the same interval, and all went as before. When I had received her in all honour and generosity, she said: "Dear lover, do you think I am really beautiful?" "As God lives, you are beautiful!" I cried. "Good," she said, "now I can ask your permission to bring a younger and more beautiful girl with me next time, so that she can joy with us and we can all three laugh and play together. She has begged me to allow her to accompany me and make a third in our mad follies." I accepted this suggestion with all my heart, and this time my mistress gave me twenty dinars so that nothing should be lacking in the reception that I gave them both next time they came. At last she parted from me again and went her way.

On the fourth occasion, I made even more splendid preparations in honour of the newcomer. Hardly had the sun set than my dear mistress came, bringing with her another woman who was enveloped in a large veil. When they were seated, I lit the torches and placed myself at their disposal, after which they removed their veils and I was able to see the second girl. Allah, Allah, she was like the full moon, a fairer thing than any I had set eyes on in the world. I served them with meat and drink and, while they were feasting, kissed the newcomer and, filling her cup, drank with her again and again. This made my mistress very angry; but she concealed her feelings, saying to me: "By Allah, is she not delicious? Do you not find her much more beautiful than I am?" Like a fool I answered: "Indeed I do!" Then said she: "Take her and keep her, then, for that would give me more pleasure than all else." "Your word is the law of my head and eyes!" I answered, so my mistress rose and, with her own wiles, helped fan the flame that had kindled between us. I was joyous with my new friend. . . . Towards the approach of morning, I slept.

When I woke I found my hand covered with blood, so that I thought I still dreamt and rubbed my eyes. Then I saw that the blood was real. As it was high morning I turned to wake my sleeping companion, but when I touched her head lightly with my fingers, it fell from her body and rolled upon the ground.

Jealousy had done its work.

Not knowing what to do, I sat for an hour in deep cogitation; then I rose and, stripping myself naked, set about preparing a grave in the very room in which we had slept. I lifted some of the marble slabs from the floor and dug a hole in the earth beneath, large enough to hold the body. Thrusting it in, I filled up the grave and replaced the marble flooring so carefully that all seemed as before.

Then I dressed and, collecting all the money which I had, went to my landlord and paid him another year's rent in advance, saying: "I am obliged to set out for Egypt where my uncles are waiting for me."

Arriving at last in Cairo I found my uncles, who were delighted to see me and questioned me as to my reason for seeking them out. "I longed to see you," I answered, "also I was afraid that I might spend all my money if I stayed longer in Damascus." They invited me to live with them and, for a whole year, I bore them company, amusing myself in many ways; drinking, eating, visiting the sights of the city, and taking pleasure in the admirable aspects of the Nile. Unfortunately at the end of a year, my uncles, who had completed all their business in the city, decided to return to Mosul. I had no wish to accompany them as I knew that they would pass through Damascus, so I left them and hid myself in the city. They set out alone, thinking that I had gone forward to Damascus to prepare accomodation for them, as I knew that place so well.

For three years I stayed in Cairo, enjoying my money to the full and sending the rent of my house in Damascus regularly to the landlord. But at the beginning of the fourth year, finding that I had scarcely money enough left for the journey, I set out myself towards Damascus.

My landlord welcomed me joyously on my arrival, and giving me the keys of my house, showed me that the lock was still sealed with my seal; and when I entered I found everything just as I had left it.

The first thing I did was to wash the flooring near the bed, in case any trace remained of the blood of the poor woman who had been murdered by her jealous friend. When this was done, I went towards the bed to lie down and rest after my tiring journey. Happening to move the pillow, I found beneath it a collar of solid gold with three tiers of nobly perfect pearls, which had belonged to the slain woman and which she had placed below the pillow before that tragic night of ours. I wept bitter tears on finding this relic, and then thrust it into the bosom of my robe.

After three hours' sleep in my house, I walked down to the market to find employment and to see my old friends there. But Destiny, whom none can gainsay, had ordered that the evil one should tempt me and that I should fall. An irresistible thought came to me to get rid of the collar by selling it. So I took it from my robe and showed it to the most able broker in the market. He invited me to sit down in his shop and, when the market was at its busiest, took the collar and hawked it round for sale. At the end of an hour he returned, saying: "At first I thought that the collar was of real gold with genuine pearls and worth at least a thousand dinars; but now I find that it is false, artificial stuff made by the Franks who can imitate every metal and precious stone. The highest offer I can get for it is a thousand dirhams." "You are quite right," I answered, "the collar is false. I had it made to play a joke on a woman to whom I had to give a present; but, by a most extraordinary chance, the woman died and left the collar to my wife. We have decided to sell it at any sacrifice. Take it, complete the business quickly, and bring me back the thousand dirhams."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Twenty-eighth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the Jewish doctor thus continued his story:

When the young man said to the broker: "Bring me back the thousand dirhams," the latter knew that the youth had no idea of the value of the collar, and, supposing that he had either found or stolen it, considered that the matter ought to be looked into. He therefore took the collar to the chief broker of the market, who himself took it to the wali of the city, saying: "This collar was stolen from me. We have just found the thief, a young man dressed like a merchant's son who is at the moment at such a place at the shop of the broker so and so."

And the young man continued to tell me his story in these words:

While I was waiting for the broker to bring me the money, I was surrounded and seized by the guards who forcibly dragged me before the wali. He questioned me about the collar and I told him the same tale as I had to the broker. But the wali burst out laughing and said: "I myself will teach you the exact price of the collar!" With that he signed to the guards; who stripped off my clothes and beat me with both rods and whips until my body was a mass of blood. "I will speak the truth!" I cried out in pain, "I stole the collar from the chief broker." I made this false confession, thinking it better to be punished on the lesser count than to tell of the terrible murder which had happened at my house and be condemned and killed outright to avenge the death of the young woman.

But hardly had I accused myself of the theft, when my arm was seized and my right hand cut off. When the stump was dipped in boiling oil to cicatrise the wound, I fell down in a faint. Someone forced a mixture of drugs between my lips which brought me to myself; so I picked up my severed hand and returned to my house. My landlord, who had heard of the affair, was waiting for me. "Now that you are known as a thief and lawbreaker," he said, "I cannot allow you to occupy my house any longer. You must pack up your goods and find a lodging elsewhere."

"My lord," I answered, "I beg you to allow me two or three days in which to look for another place." "I will willingly concede you that," he answered, and went his way.

When he had gone I threw myself on the ground weeping and saying: "How shall I ever be able to return to Mosul and see my people again? When they see my severed hand they will not believe that I am innocent, whatever I say. Things have come to such a pass that I see nothing for it but to leave all in the hands of Allah, for He alone can lead me into a way of safety."

So sad and ill was I that I could not hunt for another house, and I was still lying upon the bed when, on the third day, I saw the house invaded by a party of soldiers belonging to the governor-general of Damascus. In their midst were my landlord and the chief broker. The former said to me: "I have to inform you that the wali has told the governor-general about the theft of this collar and it has come out that the precious thing belongs, not to the chief broker, but to the governor-general himself, or rather to one of his daughters who disappeared three years ago. These soldiers have come to arrest you."

All my limbs became loose and trembled at these words, and I thought "Now there is no help for it; I go to my death. My one hope is to tell the truth, and leave my life in the hands of the governor-general." A chain was put about my neck and I was dragged before the governor who, as soon as he saw me, addressed his courtiers and people in these words: "This young man is no thief and his hand has been cut off unjustly. The chief broker is a liar and has borne false witness. Seize him and throw him into prison." Then to the chief broker himself, he continued: "You shall pay this poor young man in full for his severed hand, otherwise I shall hang you and confiscate all your goods, O broker of lies!'' To the guards he cried: ''Bring the young man face to face with me, and then let every one else depart!'' My arms were unbound, the iron collar taken from about my neck, and I was left with the governor.

He looked at me with a great pity in his face, saying: ''My child, speak to me frankly and tell me the whole truth. I wish to know how the collar came into your hands.'' ''My lord and master, I will tell you all the truth,'' I answered; and I informed him of all that had occurred between myself and the first girl, of how she had brought the second girl to me, and finally killed her through jealousy. I told him the whole thing without omitting a single detail.

When he had heard me, the governor-general bent his head on his breast in bitter grief, covered his face with his handkerchief, and wept for a long time. At last he came over to me, and said: ''Know, my son, that the first girl was my eldest daughter. She had been perverse from her childhood and so I had trained her with great severity. But even so, hardly had she reached puberty when I made haste to send her to her uncle in Cairo to be married to my nephew, one of his sons. She was married, but her husband died a short time afterwards; so that we were obliged to receive her home again into my house. Her stay in Egypt, however, had not been for nothing. She had learnt all the vices of the Egyptian women and all the evil corruptions which they practice. You have been in Egypt and must know how expert are the women there in every kind of vice. Nature alone will not suffice them. They soon wear out their bodies and their minds in transgressing the natural law. It was soon after her return to our house that my eldest daughter met you and made her four visits to you. But that was not enough. She had already had time to debauch my second daughter and to make herself thought a model by her, so that it was not difficult for her to persuade the younger one to make a third with you. My second daughter obtained leave from me to go to the market with her sister. When my eldest child returned alone, I asked her where her sister was. She answered only with tears. But at last managed to say: 'I lost her in the market; I do not know at all what has happened to her.' This was what she told me; but she opened her heart to her mother and ended by telling her the whole story of her sister's murder in your house. From that time on she did not cease from tears, and we would hear her moaning day and night: 'Needs must I weep myself to death!' What you have told me, my son, only confirms what I already knew, and proves that you spoke the truth. I am a most unhappy man; therefore do not refuse a request which I have to make of you: I wish you to become one of my own house and marry my third daughter, who is a virgin wise and pure, ignorant of the vices of her sisters. I ask no marriage settlement from you: rather will I make you a great allowance and you will live with me in my palace as a son."

"My lord," I answered, "all shall be as you wish. But there is one thing I must tell you: I have just heard that my father is dead and I would return to receive my inheritance."

The governor sent an envoy in all speed to Mosul, my native city, who, in my name, collected all that my father had left me; while I stayed here and married the governor's daughter. Since then we have all three lived the happiest of lives together.

You can see for yourself, O doctor, how loved and honoured I am in this palace. Also you will no longer think that it was incivility on my part which caused me, during all my illness, to hold my left hand out to you.

I was thunderstruck by this story (continued the Jewish doctor), and congratulated the young man heartily on the way in which he had escaped from the adventure. He loaded me with presents, kept me three days as his guest at the palace, and sent me away a rich man.

Since then I have travelled about the world perfecting myself in my art; and in doing so I have come at last to your kingdom, O powerful and generous king. Last night there happened to me an unfortunate adventure with your hunchback. Such is my story.

THEN SAID THE KING OF CHINA:

"Your tale has interested me greatly, but you are mistaken, O doctor, in thinking that it is in any way as wonderful as the adventure of the hunchback. It only remains for me to hang all four of you; and, higher than all the rest, that cursed tailor who was the cause and beginning of all your crimes."

Hearing this, the tailor advanced and faced the King of China, saying: "Glorious monarch, before you hang us allow me also to have my say. I will tell you a story which in itself contains a thousand aspects of greater marvel than all the tales you have heard put together; and surpasses by many properties the affair of the hunchback."

"If what you say it true," answered the king, "I will pardon you all. But woe betide you if the story lacks interest and is not packed with sublimity for, as Allah lives, I will not hesitate to have you all impaled, yes, hollowed right through from the bottom to the top."

THEN THE TAILOR SAID:

THE TALE OF THE TAILOR

KNOW, O lord of time, that, before my adventure with the hunchback, I was guest at a certain house where a feast was being given to the principal members of our city's guilds: tailors, cobblers, cloth merchants, barbers, carpenters, and the like.

As soon as morning broke we were all seated in a circle ready to begin the feast and only waiting for the master of the house. Presently he entered accompanied by a strange young man, handsome and well-built, mannered and costumed in the Baghdad fashion. He was as striking a young man as one could wish to see, but he was quite noticeably lame. He came among us wishing us peace and being in turn greeted by the company, and was about to take his seat when we saw him change colour, rise again, and make as if to leave the hall. We all strove to retain him, and the master of the feast pressed him heartily to remain, saying: "We do not understand this matter at all. Tell us at least, I pray, why you wish to leave us."

"As Allah lives, my lord," answered the young man, "I beg you not to try to keep me. There is one among you whose presence makes it absolutely necessary that I should retire. If you must know, it is that barber sitting there."

The master of the feast turned to us in surprise, saying: "How comes it that this youth who has just arrived from Baghdad can be in any way inconvenienced by the presence of a barber in this city?" Many of us who were guests turned to the youth, begging him to tell us the reason of his aversion to this barber. ‘‘Gentlemen,’’ he answered, ‘‘this tar-faced and pitch-spirited barber was the cause of a very strange adventure which happened to me in my native city of Baghdad. Also he was directly responsible for my lameness. I swore never to live in a city where he dwelt, or to sit down in a place where he was seated. I left Baghdad because of him and journeyed into this far country; yet here I find him also. I will set forth at once, and hope this evening to be far from your amiable city and from the presence of that malevolent dotard over there.’’

During this speech the barber’s cheeks had become quite yellow; he lowered his eyes and did not say a word. The rest of us so persuaded the young man that at last he told us the following story.

THE TALE OF THE LAME MAN WITH THE BARBER OF BAGHDAD

(Told by the Lame Young Man and reported by the Tailor)

You must know, gentlemen, that I was, by the grace of Allah, the only son of one of the principal merchants in Baghdad. Though my father was a very rich man and held in high repute throughout the city, he yet passed a very quiet life peaceably in his own house and brought me up in the same tradition. When I became a man, my father passed to the mercy of Allah, paying that debt which we all owe to Him, and left me master of all his slaves and of his house. From that time on I lived in serene prodigality, dressing myself sumptuously and eating of the best. But there is one thing which I should tell you. Allah, in whom is all power and glory, had planted in my heart a horror of women, so that but to see one of them discomfited me and vexed me. I lived without troubling about them at all, happy in other ways and not wishing for any different kind of life. One day, I was walking in the streets of Baghdad, when I saw a crowd of women coming towards me. In order to avoid them I fled up a side street which ended in a blank wall. Against the wall there was a bench on which I sat down to rest.

I had not been there long when a window opened opposite me, and a young woman appeared holding a little watering pot with which she began to water the flowers standing in vases outside the window.

I must tell you, gentlemen, that, at sight of this girl, there sprang up in my heart an emotion which I had never felt before in my life. I cannot say more than that she was beautiful as the full moon, that her little arm was white and transparent like crystal, and that she watered the flowers so prettily, any man's soul might have been caught thereby. In that one moment my heart was both burnt up and reduced to a condition of slavery. Henceforth my mind had no other thought than her, and my former horror of women was turned into a great desire of them. When she had watered the flowers she looked casually to left and right and, seeing me, gave me one long glance which snared my soul and drew it up to her. Then she shut the window; and I waited there till sunset without seeing her again. I sat there like a sleep-walker or a ghost who has no more concern with the living world.

While I remained there in this state the kadi of the city, preceded by negroes and followed by attendants, rode up on his mule and dismounted at the door of that house where I had seen the young girl. When he disappeared through the door, I understood that he was her father.

I returned home in a lamentable state of spirit, full of sadness and care, and threw myself down on my bed. My women, together with the slaves and the folk of my house, clustered round me, asking me unceasingly the reason for my collapse; but I would not answer them. From day to day my heart grew more afflicted, until I fell seriously ill and was an object of acute anxiety to my friends and family.

One day I saw an old woman come into the room who, instead of groaning and weeping over my condition as the others did, sat down and calmed my spirit with sprightly common-place. Having regarded me closely for a long time, she asked all the people who were by me to leave me alone with her. When they had left, she said to me: ''My child, I know why you are ill, but it is necessary for you to give me details.'' I told her the whole story and she continued: ''My son, that girl is the daughter of the kadi of Baghdad and the house which you saw in his house. But he does not live on the same story as his daughter, having his apartments in the lower part of the building. Yet, although the young woman lives alone, she is very carefully guarded and spied upon. I am, however, a friend and constant visitor of the family and you will never gain your ends except through me. Stiffen up, now, and be a man.''

These words gave me both courage and resolution. I rose, and felt myself to be quite well again and indeed in a state of bodily perfection. All my family rejoiced; and the old woman left me, promising to return on the morrow to tell me the result of the interview which she intended to have with the young daughter of the kadi of Baghdad.

She kept her promise but, at the first sight of her face, I knew that, as is usual in such cases, she had no good news to give me. She said: ''My child, do not ask me what has happened. I am still all of a tremble. Hardly had I whispered the object of my visit to the young lady when she sprang up and talked to me very angrily. She called me an ill-omened old woman, and said that if I did not cease my evil proposals she would have me punished as I deserved. I could not say more, dear boy; but I promise to return to the attack at once. Never have I undertaken a project of this sort without something coming of it; for no one in the world knows more about the business than I do.'' With these words she left me.

Because of this disappointment I fell more seriously ill than before and ceased either to eat or drink.

In a few days the old woman came back as she had promised and said to me, with a smiling and contented face: ''Come, my son, give me the reward of good news.'' Instantly I felt the vigour return to my body for very joy, and I said to the old woman: ''Mother, you shall have everything you wish.'' Then she told me these good tidings: ''Yesterday I went back to the dear young lady and when she saw that I wore a humble and defeated air and that my eyes were filled with tears, she said: 'Auntie, I see that you are in trouble. What is it?' I replied, weeping all the time: 'My daughter, my dear mistress, do you not remember that I came to speak to you about a young man who had fallen passionately in love with you? Well then, today that young man is lying at the point of death for your sake.' On this her heart was softened and she said: 'But who is this young man of whom you speak?' 'He is as an own son to me, as the fruit of my body,' I answered: 'A few days ago he saw you watering the flowers at your window; just for a moment he saw your face and on the instant he, who until then had refused to look upon the face of woman, felt himself lost in love for you. When I told him a few days ago of the naughty reception you had accorded me, he fell into a worse state of love-sickness than before. I have just left him stretched upon his bed, in act to render his last breath to Allah. I do not think there is any chance of saving him!' The girl paled at my words, saying: 'And is all that because of me?' 'As Allah lives, it is,' I answered. 'What are you going to do now? I am your slave and will carry out any orders that you will give me.' 'Go to him as quickly as you can,' she said, 'greet him for me, and tell him that I have much sorrow for his sorrow. Tell him that I will wait for him here tomorrow after the Friday prayer. Let him come and I will open to him; he shall come up into my apartment and we will spend an hour together. But tell him that he must be sure to go away promptly, before my father returns from the mosque.' "

When I heard the delightful words of the old woman, my manhood came back to me and all my sorrows slipped away. I gave her a purse filled with dinars which she accepted, saying: "Lift up your heart and be content!" "My illness is over," I answered. And indeed my sickness had quite left me so that my friends and the people of my house were delighted at my sudden cure.

Impatiently I waited for the morrow and with it came the old woman, asking news of my health. I said that I did wonderfully well and we talked together for some time. Then I dressed myself in the costliest robes I had and scented myself with essence of roses. I was on the point of setting out for the girl's house, when the old woman said: "You have plenty of time. Why not go to the hammam while you are waiting, to bathe and be massaged, shaved and depilated; for all these things will improve your appearance after your illness." "An excellent plan!" I answered, "first I will send for a barber to shave my head here, and then I will go down to the hammam."

I ordered one of my young slaves to fetch me a barber, adding: "See to it that he not only has a light hand, but is a man wise and discreet, sparing of words and questions; one who will not split my head with his babble as would most of his kind." My slave ran to obey me and brought back with him a barber who was none other, gentlemen, than the sinister old man you see before you.

When he entered he wished me peace and I did the like by him. Then said he: "May Allah move very far away from you all grief, all care, all anxiety, all trouble, and all misfortune!" "May Allah grant your wishes!" I answered. "Well, well," he continued, "I bring you good news, my master, very good news, or rather not exactly good news, but good wishes for your complete return to health and strength. But business is business. What exactly would you wish me to do? To shave you or to let blood? You cannot be ignorant that the great Ibn-Abbas once said: 'He who has his hair shortened of a Friday makes himself acceptable to Allah, Who thereafter averts from him seventy different kinds of calamity.' On the other hand you cannot have forgotten that the same Ibn-Abbas said on another occasion: 'He who has his blood let on a Friday, or submits on that day to an application of the cupping-glasses, goes in great danger of losing his sight and is apt to attract every kind of malady to himself.' "

"Old man," I answered, "I would wish you to cease your conversation for a time and shave my head as quickly as you can, for I am still weak from my illness and ought neither to speak nor to listen very much.''

The barber rose and, taking a bundle wrapped in a handkerchief such as the men of his trade use to carry their basin, their razors, and their scissors, he opened it and took out, not a razor, but a seven-faced astrolabe. Walking with it into the middle of the courtyard of my house, he lifted his head gravely towards the sun and, after regarding it for a long time and then examining the astrolabe for even longer, he returned to me saying: ''You must know that this day of Friday is the tenth of the month of Safar in the seven hundred and sixty third year of the Hegira of our Sacred Prophet, on Whom be all the best that there can be of prayers and of peace. Now such knowledge as I have of the science of numbers tells me that this Friday coincides exactly with the moment of conjunction of the two planets Mars and Mercury, the ascension being exactly seven degrees and six minutes, which seems clearly to denote that today is not only lawful but auspicious for the action of shaving the head. The same series of calculations tells me that it is your intention to pay a visit today to a young lady, of which good may come or possibly evil; I do not say that I actually need my science for the purpose of prophesying exactly what will happen when you and the young lady are together; but that hardly matters, as there are some things about which it is necessary sedulously to keep silence.''

''As Allah lives,'' I cried, ''you suffocate me with your talk; it will kill me in a minute! Besides, you do not seem to be prophesying very pleasant things. I brought you here to shave my head. Do so at once with no more words.'' ''Be it exactly as you say,'' he answered, ''though I cannot help thinking that if you knew the truth you would ask me for many more details and demonstrations. For you must know that though I am a barber, I am not only a barber. So little so, in fact, that, though I am perhaps the best known barber in Baghdad, I have at my finger's ends not only the arts of the doctor, the herbalist, and the chemist, but also, to name but a few of my accomplishments, the whole science of the stars, the theory of grammar, the art and rule of poetry, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, algebra, philosophy, architecture, history, and the traditional folk-lore of all the people of the earth. I only tell you this that you may see that I had a certain amount of right on my side, my lord, when I advised you to follow my instructions exactly in the matter of obeying the little horoscope which I have just had the great pleasure of making for you, thanks to my knowledge of astral calculation. If I were you, I would thank Allah, my son, that it was I who came to you and not some other, and I should obey the suggestions of one who only speaks in your own interest. You must not think that I do these things for money or indeed for any reason, save from the purest good will. I am ready enough to shave you, nay, even to stay in your service for a whole year, and not ask a penny in wages; only there is one thing that I think I have a right to ask, and that is that I should be recognised and spoken to as a man of some merit. I think that you will agree that that is only just."

Here I broke in upon him crying: "Would you drive me mad and kill me with impatience at the same time, you old murderer?"

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Twenty-ninth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the young man broke in impatiently on the barber's speech, the latter answered: "That is exactly the one point on which you are mistaken, master. Every one without exception knows me as Al-Samit, the silent man, because of the scant use that I can make of words. If you consider for a moment, you will see how unjust you have been to me in thinking me talkative, especially if you spare a moment to compare me with my six brothers who, I admit, are a little given to babbling. Perhaps you have not heard of them? Well, just that you shall know them when I speak of them again, I will tell you their names. The eldest is called Al-Bakbuk, that is to say, he who when he tattles makes a glucking noise like water coming out of a jar. The second is called Al-Haddar, that is to say, he who continually lows like a camel. The name of the third is Bakbak, or the swollen clucker. The fourth, Al-Kuz of Assouan, or the unbreakable jug. The fifth is Al-Ashar, that is to say, either the gravid she-camel or the great pot. The sixth is Shakalik or the cracked guglet. And the seventh is Al-Samit, the silent man. This silent man is your humble servant."

At this fresh start of the barber's I felt my gall-bladder on the point of bursting and I cried out to one of my young slaves: "For God's sake, give this man a quarter of a dinar and have him out of this. I am not going to have my head shaved after all."

Hearing what I said to the slave, the barber continued: "I should call those harsh words, master;

yes, I should think anyone would be entitled to call them harsh words. I do not think you quite realise that I wish to have the honour of attending to you without any thought of money and, if I am willing to shave you without asking anything in return, you can understand that I would be quite incapable of taking money when I had not even been allowed to do you this slight service. No, no, I could not think of such a thing; I should consider myself dishonoured for ever if I took the least little thing from you under those circumstances. I quite see that you have no idea of my value. That does not prevent me from having a very exact idea of your great value. I assure you that I consider you in every way a worthy son of your dear old father, whom may Allah be now lodging in His compassion. Now there was a gentleman for you! Yes, your dear old father was a gentleman if ever there was one. I owed a lot to your father. For some reason he was always showering benefits upon me. Never was a more generous man, never was a grander man, if I may be allowed to say it, and for some reason he used to value me very highly. I remember one day, just as it might have been today, your dear old father sent for me. I found him surrounded by noble visitors, but he left them at once and came up to greet me, saying: 'I beg you to let me a little blood, old friend.' On that, I unwrapped my astrolabe, measured the height of the sun and found out that that particular hour was peculiarly inauspicious for blood-letting. I assure you that it would have been both a difficult and dangerous undertaking. Well, I went and told my fears to your poor dead father—woe is me that such a delightful patron should have passed into Allah's keeping; he believed me at once and waited patiently, chatting with me more as if he had been my friend than my employer, until the suitable moment came for the operation. When the right hour came I bled him well—he was always a good patient—and then he thanked me warmly. And he was not the only one; all the guests came up and thanked me as well. Now that I come to think of it, though I had quite forgot when I began to tell you of this, your dear father was so pleased with the way I bled him that he gave me a hundred golden dinars on the spot.''

When he had got thus far, I shouted: ''May Allah have no pity on my dead father if ever he was fool enough to have anything to do with a barber like you!''

Laughing and shaking his head the barber answered: ''There is no other God but Allah and Muhamad is his prophet! Blessed be the name of Him who changes some things and does not change others! I thought at first that you were in full possession of your senses, laddie, but now I see that your illness has a little affected your head. Not that I am surprised, mind you; I remember the Sacred Words which Allah wrote in our Holy and Precious Book, the verse begins I think: 'Blessed are they who control their anger and forgive the offender . . .' I will not hear of you apologising for anything you may have said to me. I forgive it all. And yet, I must confess, that I do not quite understand this impatience and hurry of yours. You ought to know better than anyone else that your dear old father never took any important step without first asking my advice. He at least knew the worth of the proverb which says: 'The man who takes good council has provided himself with a shield.' I am rather an exceptional man, as a matter of fact. In all my life, though I have searched diligently, I have never found a man who can give better advice than I can. I suppose it is because I have made myself master of all wisdom and have had an excellent business experience. Well, here I am, standing on my two old feet before you, just waiting for you to tell me what I can do for you. One interesting point occurs to me: why is it that I should not be in the least tired of you when you are so manifestly tired of me? And yet I suppose that that is not really difficult to understand. If I show more than ordinary patience in my dealings with you, my boy, it is because of the great regard I shall always feel for your dear old father."

"By God, this is too much!" I yelled, "your advice is a slow torture. I sent for you to shave my head. Now I command you to leave the house as quickly as possible!" So saying, I jumped up and made as if to eject him forcibly, although my head was by this time covered with soapy lather.

But, without heeding me at all, the wretched old man went on: "I am afraid I am irritating you, young man, and yet I am too wise to care about a little thing like that. I can see well that your mind is not quite recovered from its illness. Still you are young and there is plenty of time for that. Dear me, dear me, it seems only the other day that I used to carry you to school, you riding piggy-back on my shoulders and I taking you all the way to the school like that and you kicking me in the sides and not wanting to go. It seems just like the other day."

"My friend," I said seriously, "I must beg you by all that you hold most holy to let me go about my business." With this I tore my clothes and began shrieking like a madman.

When he saw me behaving in this way the barber hunted about for his razor and, when he had found it, began to strop it and passed it up and down the leather so many times that I thought if he did not stop my soul would incontinently leave my body. At last, however, he took my head in one hand and made one little pass with the razor, removing a few hairs. Then he lifted his hand and said: "Young master, impatience comes by the temptation of the Evil One!" And he recited the following ill-conceived moral stanzas:

The wise man hatches out a plan
By sitting on it like a hen;
The cautious and inactive man
Is blessed above all other men.

The man who would admired go
Should carefully regard this text:
Have mercy on a fallen foe,
You know not what may happen next.

However strong a tyrant is
Allah is even more than he is:
He raises up the poor to bliss,
And brings the tyrant to his knees.

Then said he: "I know quite well, my master, that you have no regard either for my talents or for my inner worth; and yet the hand which is quite ready to shave you if you give the word has caressed the heads of kings, of emirs, of wazirs, of governor-generals, of governors, of assistant governors, of princes, of men famous in every way. I think it must have been in my honour, or in the honour of someone very like me, that the poet said:

All trades are jewels in the crown of state,
But one round pearl of price the centre harbours,

Which to themselves each guild would arrogate;
While I have always said it was the barber's,
Who stands with subtle steel and phrases bland,
Holding the heads of kings beneath his hand."

To this vomit of words I answered: "Are you or are you not going to shave me? I am not far from dead because of you."

Then said the barber: "An idea has suddenly struck me. I really believe that you are in a hurry."

"Of course I am, of course I am, of course I am!" I answered.

"Well, well," he said, "who'd have thought of your being in a hurry! It is my duty to give you counsels of moderation; haste is one of the most obvious snares of the Tempter. I have never known haste to lead to anything except repentance. Our dear Lord, Muhamad, on Whom be prayer and peace, used to say: 'The most beautiful thing in the world is something quite ripe which has been made slowly.' But what you have just said about being in a hurry interests me very much. I should very much like to hear your reasons. I hope your hurry is what one might call a pleasant hurry, a hurry, that is to say, leading to pleasant things. I cannot tell you how desolate I should be if your hurry were a disagreeable hurry. Now I know you will excuse me if I interrupt my operation for a moment, for I think that the time has been slipping away and there remain only a few more hours of suitable sunshine. With this he put down his razor, took out his astrolabe, and went out into the sun. He stayed an intolerable time in the courtyard taking the exact height of the sun, but keeping an eye on me all the time and satisfying himself that I was there by asking me questions. When he came back he said:

"If by chance you are in a hurry to be in time for midday prayer, calm yourself, laddie, for you have three good hours to spare. I never make a mistake in matters of time."

Then said I: "As Allah lives, let us have no more prattle: your voice is pulverising my liver."

At this the barber consented to take up his razor again and began to shave a small part of my head very gently and deliberately; but he went on talking all the time in this fashion: "I am sorry to see you so impatient; I feel sure that if you were to tell me the reason I would be able to help you. You have no excuse for hiding anything from me, since you now know how much your poor father valued my advice."

There seemed no possible way of extricating myself from under the hands of this horrible barber and I said to myself: "The time for prayer is at hand and I ought very soon to be at the house of the young woman, otherwise it will be too late and I shall hardly get there before prayer ends and folk come out of the mosque. Then all will be lost." So I said to the barber: "Make an end now: try to control your flow of talk and your ill-mannered curiosity. If you really must know, I am in a hurry to get to a feast at the house of one of my friends."

On the word feast, the barber cried out: "Well, well, Allah bless you! Surely this is my lucky day! You have just reminded me that I am giving a feast tonight. Many of my friends have been invited and I have competely forgotten to prepare the necessary entertainment. It is a pity that you could not have reminded me a little sooner. Now it is too late." "Do not worry about that," I said, "I can get you out of the difficulty. As I have told you, I am going to a feast, so that I shall not be dining at home. I will therefore give you all the meats and drinks which I have in the house on condition that you waste no more time in shaving my head." "Allah smother you with gifts, my master, and make each generous act of yours come home as a blessing to you. Tell me a little, sweet master, about the things with which you are about to overwhelm me, for I confess that I would like to know."

"I have five cooking pots for you," I answered, "all containing admirable food: egg-apples and stuffed marrows, filled vine-leaves seasoned with lemon, cakes of bruised corn and minced meat, sliced fillet of mutton cooked in tomatoed rice, a stew of little onions; further I have ten roast fowls and a roast sheep, two great dishes one of kenafa and the other of a pastry made with sweet cheese and honey; fruits of every kind: melons, cucumbers, limes, and fresh dates." "Ah, master, master!" cried the barber, "delight me with the sight of all these wonderful things."

I ordered the food to be brought in to us and the barber examined and tasted every dish. Then turning to me with a happy smile, he said: "I have known no generosity to equal yours, young man. And did you not say something about drinks?" "I did," I answered. "May I not just look upon them?" said he. So I had six great jars brought in, each filled with a different wine, and the barber well tasted all of them. "Allah will requite you for all this!" said my tormentor. "You are the soul of generosity. All would be most bounteously complete with a little incense, some benzoin, a few scents for burning, a touch of rose-water and orange-water to sprinkle my guests withal." In desperation I had a little chest brought containing more than fifty golden dinars' worth of ambergris, aloe-wood, nard, musk, incense and benzoin, which I had packed up for him with aromatic essences and silver water sprays. Then, as my time had become even less than my patience, I said: ''You may carry away all this as soon as you have finished shaving me; so in the Lord's name be quick.'' Then said the barber: ''I can never take away so handsome a little box without first seeing what is inside and thanking you for all.'' So one of my young slaves opened up the chest again and the barber, setting aside his astrolabe, sat on his heels and began to finger all the perfumes, the incense, the benzoin, the musk, the ambergris, and the aloe-wood; sniffing one after the other in so slow an ecstasy that I nearly died upon the spot. At long last he rose and, after thanking me elaborately, resumed his razor and went on shaving. Hardly had the blade passed once along my scalp, however, when he stopped again and said: ''As Allah lives, my child, I hardly know which to thank for this blessed day, you or your poor dead father. The feast which I shall be giving tonight could never have been save for your kind thought and most unexpected gifts. And yet there is one thing which I feel I ought to say, though it is not the sort of thing that a man usually confesses; to tell you the truth, my guests for tonight are hardly such as would usually be considered worthy of such magnificent entertainment. They are just common humble men, like myself, who have to work for their living. Mind you, I'm not saying a word against them; they're all excellent fellows, delightful companions, full of interest to the seeing eye. You will understand better if I tell you who they are. First there is the excellent Zaytun, rubber at the baths; then the delightful Salih, who sells roast bruised chick-peas; Haukal, the bean merchant; Hakrashat, the vegetable seller; Hamid, the scavenger; and last but not least, Hakaresh, the curdled-milk man.

As is natural, all these friends of mine are like myself in this, they are never talkative or curious, yet they are all good drinkers and side-splitting fellows. I love the least of them above all kings. Each has his own song and dance, renowned throughout Baghdad. Lord bless you, I could run all of their songs and dances off for you if it would amuse you.

Just look here, this is Zaytun, the rubber's little dance: this way, that way, and round about like this. His song goes this way:

My little friend is like a lamb
All soothe to fondle and to feel;
Her happiness is where I am,
And if to make a jest I steal
Away from her, she runs instead
To jump and tumble on my bed.

Ah, but you should see the dance of my friend Hamid, the scavenger! There's a fellow for you! . . . What do you think of it? Gay and suggestive, is it not? And yet it has a certain technical perfection. His song is a sweet thing:

My wife who is a stingy jade,
As ugly as a toothless hound,
Hides all my food beyond detection;
And yet she wants her fullest pound
Of warm connubial affection.

If I must curb my stomach's lust,
Then she shall starve her wifely feelings;
For, if she will not give a crust,
With her I'll have no pleasant dealings.

Straightway, before I could interfere, this disgusting old man danced me off the dances and sang me the songs of the rest of his friends. Then said he: "Now that you know what my jolly companions can do, if you want a good laugh I would advise you to come and make one of us at my feast tonight, and give your friends the go-by for the time being. You will enjoy yourself more and we will be all the happier. I have a special reason for inviting you in this way; there are traces of fatigue on your face and you have just risen from a bed of sickness; it is just possible, if you went to your grand party, you might find some talkative individual among the guests who would weary you by clothing his ideas in too many words and asking indiscreet questions. If that were so, you might fall ill again and be worse than before."

"For today, good barber," I answered, "I am afraid that it is impossible for me to accept you invitation, but another time I shall be delighted to come." "And yet," said the barber, "I cannot help repeating that I think it would be to your best advantage to come to my house, with as little delay as possible, to enjoy the polished urbanity of my good friends and to take advantage of all their admirable qualities. You know the poet says:

When pleasure offers, dear my friends,
Catch hands or feet or hair of her;
She is a woman and descends
To act as seems but fair of her,
Perhaps three times a week. The other days
"How gross a thing man typifies!" she says.

Although my soul was flaming with anger, yet I could not help the barriers of my reserve being washed away by this stream of nonsense. So I burst out laughing and said: "Surely such wonderful friends must be waiting impatiently for so wonderful a host! Finish your work and begone!" "And yet," said the barber, "I cannot understand why you refuse. I only ask a very small favour of you: to allow me to gladden your soul for the rest of its days by introducing you to all the jolly and discreet old lads of my acquaintance. Once you have met them, you will make constant companions of them and give up all your other friends for ever." "God increase you all in your friendship," I answered, "I promise that some day I will invite them to my house and give a special feast for them alone."

"Thank you, thank you," mumbled the wretched scraper, "now that I see you really prefer your own friends to the chance of meeting mine, just give me a moment to run home with all these excellent things that you have given me and set them before my friends, who know me too well to take offence if I leave them alone; and I will return, finish your shaving, and accompany you wherever you may wish to go."

"There is no power nor might save in Allah!" I cried, "shave me quickly and then hurry to your friends and have a fine old-fashioned evening with them. But let me go my own way by myself. My hosts are expecting me even now." "Never, never," said the barber, "I should feel dishonoured if I allowed you to go alone." Keeping tight hold of myself lest I should insult the old scourge, I answered: "My good man the place where I am going is one which I must approach quite alone." "I was afraid so," he said, "I was very much afraid of that. You are going to meet a woman; otherwise you would have taken me with you. You do not seem to realise that I am the best sort of person in the world for such an expedition. I can be a great deal of use, especially if, as I fear, the woman turns out to be some cozening stranger. It would be very rash to go alone. You would probably be murdered. Those sorts of meetings are hardly advisable in present-day Baghdad: in fact, not advisable at all. I gather that it is all the fault of the new governor who is very hard on irregularities of the kind, owing, it is said, to the fact that he is a eunuch and therefore considers love-making a wicked thing."

It was at these words that I lost my temper for the first time and shouted: "Will you clear out of here, you traitor, you hangman, you vilest of old busybodies!" So the barber, also for the first time, fell silent and, taking up his razor, finished shaving me; but by this time the hour for midday prayer had come and gone and the prayer itself must have been drawing towards a close, or it seemed to me in my impatience.

When the barber had finished shaving me, I said in order to get rid of him: "Carry all this food and drink to your house. I promise to wait for you so that you can accompany me on my expedition." "I see that you want to get rid of me," he answered, "and go off by yourself. I must beg you not to be so rash as to stir from your house until I return. Otherwise I cannot be responsible for any calamities that befall you." "Very well," I said, "only do not be too long."

I helped the old man load the two platters of pastry on his head and all the other things I had given him on his shoulders; but no sooner had he left my house than he gave all to two porters to carry to his own home and slunk into a shadowy bye-way to wait my coming out.

Left alone, I washed in all haste and dressing myself in my richest robe, left the house. At the moment I did so I heard the voice of the muezzins calling to the sacred Friday midday prayer:

Allah! Allah! Allah! The Tender Hearted,
Whose mercy exceeds all understanding;
Praise be to the Master, the Clemency,
Passing the knowledge of men.
He Who was our help since time began,
The Same shall judge us on the last day.
Lead us therefore into the broad path of Thy blessing,
And let us not go down into the anger of our God.

I ran as fast as I could to the girl's house and, just as I had reached the door which had been left open for me, threw a glance over my shoulder and saw the perfidious chin-slicer stealing after me down the side-street. I sprang into the house and shut the door after me. The old woman, who was impatiently waiting, led me at once to the upper story where her mistress lodged. But even while I was greeting my phantom of delight we heard a noise of people in the street and, looking out, perceived the kadi and all his followers returning from prayer. Also I caught sight of the barber standing across the street and evidently waiting for me.

My dear lady reassured me by saying that her father seldom visited her and that there were plenty of hiding-places for me; but, as ill-luck would have it, there was one circumstance which brought about my ruin. It chanced that one of the kadi's girl-slaves had merited the rod; so that her master immediately on his return began thrashing her as hard as he could on the buttocks. She made so much noise that one of the negroes of the house ran in and begged pardon for her. Turning on him furiously, the kadi began to belabour him also and he set up a yelling which might have brought the roofs down. The noise was easily heard in the street and this ill-omened nose-pincher, as soon as he heard it, thought that I was being set upon in the house. At once he let out great cries for help, tearing his garments, covering his head with dust, and begging all the passers-by to rescue me. "They're killing my master in the kadi's house!" he shouted again and again; and, still yelling, he ran with a great crowd at his heels to my house, where he roused all my servants and slaves. Every able-bodied man within my house armed himself with a stick and formed a body-guard which raced back with the crowd, under the leadership of the barber, and began to make a great tumult outside the kadi's door. Hearing the clamour of the mob the kadi looked out of the window and saw a great multitude battering on his door with sticks. Seeing that, though they were noisy, they were not in a very bad humour, he went down and opened the door, crying: "Good friends, what is the matter?" Then all my servants yelled: "You have killed our master!" "Who is this master of yours?" he asked, "and what fault did he commit that I should kill him?"

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirtieth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the astonished Kadi cried: "Who is this master of yours and what fault did he commit that I should kill him? And above all what is this barber doing in the midst of you, braying like a wild ass?" that the barber answered: "Wretched old man, you have just laid my master low with a rain of blows. I myself was in the street and heard his cries." "But what master?" asked the kadi, "whence does he come, whither was he going? How could he be in my house? And why should he have deserved a rain of blows?" "Treacherous kadi," said the barber, "do not try to deceive me, for I know all; both why my master entered your house and every other detail of the matter. Let all these good people present learn that your daughter is in love with my master and he with her. I accompanied him as far as this place and hardly had he entered when you surprised him in bed with your daughter and, aided by your vile servants, stunned him with many sticks. Either you must come with me to the khalifat, who shall be sole judge between us, or you shall give us back our master on the spot, paying him handsomely for the wrongs you have done him, or else I shall have to enter your house by force and rescue him myself. Haste then to give him back to us!"

The kadi was robbed of speech, put to confusion, and overcome by shame, when these intimate things were shouted out before all the people; but nevertheless he answered the barber: "If you are not a liar you have but to come in with me. I give you free leave to search the entire house."

Without loss of time the barber threw himself through the door across the threshold into the house. When I, who had witnessed the whole scene through the trellis of the window, saw his entry, I wished to flee, but could find no way out which would not take me in sight of the people of the house or else make me meet the barber. At last, in one of the rooms where I was hunting for an exit, I saw a great empty wooden chest into which I jumped and then pulled the lid down on top of me and waited, holding my breath. When the barber had ferretted through the whole house, he came into the room where I was and, looking to right and left, saw the chest. Instantly divining what was in it, the indiscreet fool lifted it on his head and ran downstairs with it into the street. I was bumping about in the chest, more dead than alive, when, as ill-luck would have it, the crowd insisted on knowing what was inside the box. The lid was opened in a twinkling. Feeling that I could not bear the shame and jeers that would greet my appearance, I threw myself to the ground, breaking my leg in my fall. That is why I limp to this day. At the moment I had no other thought except flight; so, throwing handfuls of gold to the crowd, I took advantage of the subsequent stooping and struggling of the people to hop away from that street as fast as I could. I had painfully passed through many of the lesser streets of Baghdad, when I suddenly heard the detested voice of the barber behind me, who cried in a loud voice as he ran: "Good people, good people, thanks be to Allah that I have found my master again! They wished to strike me to the heart by hurting him; but Allah would not allow the wicked to triumph, so he made me victorious against them and allowed me to deliver my master out of their hands!'' Then, running up behind me, he said: ''Master, you can see now how ill-advised you were to practise impatience and ignore my counsels. Had it not been for Allah, Who raised me up for your deliverance, you would have suffered the worst of deaths and been lost for ever. Pray then to Him, my son, that He may long preserve me to be ever with you, as it were a wise old guide, now that you have proved yourself a lad of feeble mind, little better than an idiot . . . But where are you running to? Wait for me.'' Not knowing how else to get rid of him, except possibly by dying, I stopped short and said very solemnly: ''O barber, does it not suffice you to have reduced me to this state? Do you wish my death also?''

As I was speaking I noticed opposite to me in the market where I had halted the open shop of a merchant whom I knew. Dragging myself inside this, I begged my friend to prevent my senile pursuer from coming in after me. This he did by shaking an enormous whip and rolling his eyes terribly. But even so the barber only departed after cursing the shopkeeper, and the father and the grandfather of the shopkeeper, with every evil wish and foul word he knew.

My friend was naturally curious; so I told him the whole tale of the barber and begged him to allow me to stay in the shop until my leg was better, as I had no wish to return home where I might at any time be haunted by the hateful barber whose face was to me by this time more bitter than death itself. When my leg had well set, I gathered together all the money I had, made a will leaving everything of which I should die possessed to members of my family, and appointed a man I could trust to look after all my interests at home. Then, sheerly that I should be done for ever with this barber, I left Baghdad, my native city, and set out for this far country where I thought I could never by any chance come face to face with my intolerable foe. Yet no sooner had I arrived here, gentlemen, than I find him sitting among you an honoured guest at the first feast to which I have been invited.

You may rest assured that I shall know no moments' peace until I have left this country as I left my own. And all this wandering and expense is due to that white-haired fiend, that perverse relic, that murderous barber, whom Allah curse, with all his folk and every child who ever bears the least taint of his blood!

When the lame young man had told this sorrowful tale (continued the tailor to the king of China) he rose quite yellow in the face and, wishing us peace, hurried away from among us.

We others looked searchingly at the barber who had sat silent all the time with lowered eyes: "Is the young man's story true?" we asked him, "And if so, why did you behave in such a way as to lead the poor youth into all these misfortunes?" "Lead is it, by God?" said the barber, raising his head, "I would have you know that I behaved as I did only after scrupulous thought and that if it had not been for me he would have fallen more deeply still into the mire of accident and perished for ever! He should thank Allah and he should thank me that it was his leg and not his life which paid the penalty. You are all wise men here, my masters; so to prove to you that I am neither talkative nor indiscreet, two qualities with which the good God has seen fit to afflict my six brothers, I will tell you my story and you shall see for yourselves that I am wise, cautious, discreet, and above all, very silent. Judge now!"

We sat silent, continued the tailor, and listened to the barber's tale.

THE TALE OF THE BARBER OF BAGHDAD AND THE TALES OF HIS SIX BROTHERS

(Told by the Barber, and reported by the Tailor)

THE TALE OF THE BARBER

THE BARBER SAID:

YOU MUST KNOW, my masters, that I lived in Baghdad during the reign of Al-Montaser Billah, Prince of Believers. Those were good days for the people, because he loved the poor and the low-born, though he himself was ever companioned by sages and seers and poets.

One day the khalifat had a judgment to do upon ten men who lived not far from the city, so he ordered a minor governor to bring them before him. Fate willed that just as they were being embarked on a boat to cross the Tigris, I was walking on the banks of the river. Seeing so many in a boat together I said to myself: "This is a pleasure party. They are going out for the day to make merry together with eating and drinking. Though I die for it, I will be their guest and share the sport."

I went down to the water's edge and, without saying a word, for I am the Silent Man, jumped on board and mingled with the merry companions. But hardly had I done so when the wali's guards came aboard and put iron chains about the necks and wrists of all the ten and about my neck and wrists also. And yet I never said a word, never whispered a syllable; which proves I think, my masters, that I have both courage and the gift of holding my tongue. As I made no protest, the crossing was accomplished and all of us were led before the khalifat Montaser Billah, Prince of Believers.

Seeing us, the khalifat called the executioner and said: ‘‘Cut off the heads of these ten rogues!’’ The executioner made us kneel in line before the sultan and, lifting his thin sword, cut off all ten heads, one after the other, each with a single blow. When he came to me he stopped, as ten heads lay upon the ground, and told the khalifat that the execution was over. But seeing me still upright the sultan cried: ‘‘I ordered you to cut off all ten heads!’’ ‘‘As true as Allah is good to you and you are good to us,’’ the executioner answered, ‘‘I have cut off ten heads.’’ ‘‘Count them,’’ said the King. The count was made and there lay ten heads and ten bodies. So the khalifat turned to me, saying: ‘‘Who are you and what are you doing among these lovers of bloodshed?’’ Then and then only, my masters, I decided to break through my habitual rule of silence and said: ‘‘Prince of Believers, I am an old man called Al-Samit, because of the brevity of my speeches. Wisdom I have in plenty; but of my acute judgment, the weight of such discourse as I use, my excellence in reason, my keen intelligence, and my habit of judicious silence I will say nothing; since these things speak for themselves. I am a barber by trade and one of the seven sons of my father. Now for the adventure which brought me here! This morning I was walking beside the Tigris when I saw these ten poor mortalities embarking in a boat. Thinking that they were going off for some jaunt on the water, I made myself one of their number. I soon saw that I had fallen among criminals because your guards came and chained us all by the neck, yet even then, and although I did not know any of my companions, I neither protested nor spoke—from a habit which I have of resolution and silence.

"Thus it was that I was led before you, O Prince of Believers. When you ordered the heads of the ten criminals to be cut off and I alone remained beneath the stroke of the executioner, even then I did not say a single word. That I think is a proof of considerable courage and, when I come to think of it, the very fact that I associated myself willingly with these ten unknown men argues a greater heroism than I have heard of elsewhere. Yet you must not be astonished at what I did, Prince of Believers, for all my life I have gone out of my way to oblige strangers."

When the khalifat heard my words and understood that I was a courageous and manly ancient, loving silence and the well-considered thought, detesting all curiosity and indiscretion, whatever that lame young man may have said just now (he whom I saved from so much trouble too!), he said to me: "Venerable sheikh, high-souled and decorous barber, tell me, are your six brothers, like you, dowered with all knowledge and discretion?" "Allah preserve me," I answered. "They are so different, Prince of Believers, that you almost insult me by comparing me to them. They are six mad slack-mouthed fellows and there is all the difference of the world between us. Because of their insane babblings, their indiscretions, and their unnatural cowardice, each has drawn on himself many calamities and at least one deformity of body. While I am vigorous and healthy of mind and limb; my first brother is lame, the second is one-eyed, the third broken-mouthed, the fourth blind, the fifth ear-cropped and with his nose sliced off, the sixth lip-gashed.

But I would not like you to think, Prince of Believers, that I am exaggerating the faults and disqualities of my brothers. You will only understand how different they are from me if I tell you all their stories. The tales about them are full of moral lessons for the circumspect; so without more ado I will tell you:

THE TALE OF BAKBUK, THE BARBER'S FIRST BROTHER

KNOW, O COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL, that the eldest of my brothers, he who became lame, is called Bakbuk because when he tattles he makes a glucking noise like water coming out of a jar. At one time he was a tailor in Baghdad.

He used to do his sewing in a small shop which he rented from a very rich merchant who himself lived in the top part of the house above the shop. In the basement there was a mill where a miller lived and kept his bullock.

One day as my brother Bakbuk was sitting sewing in his shop he chanced to raise his eyes and saw a woman looking out at the passers-by from a skylight let in the terrace floor above him. She was the wife of the owner of the building and her looking forth was like the rising of the young moon. Bakbuk's heart was fired with passion at the sight of her. He could sew no more, but spent all day with his head fixed looking up at the skylight as if he were an idiot. Next morning he was in his place by dawn and every time he took a stitch his eye wandered to the skylight, so that he pricked his fingers more than the cloth. For several days he did the same, neither working nor bringing in any money.

It was not long before the young woman understood my brother's feelings and made up her mind to derive both profit and amusement from them. One day as Bakbuk was sitting there in his customary adoration she threw him a laughing glance which pierced his heart. He gave her back a languishing look which was so ridiculous that she had to retire precipitately to laugh at her ease. And the fool Bakbuk was overjoyed that day by the conquest which he thought he had made.

Next morning therefore my brother was not astonished to see his landlord entering the shop, carrying a great roll of rich silk under his arm. The merchant said: "I have brought this piece of stuff so that you can sew some shirts for me." "Certainly, certainly, they shall be ready this very evening," answered Bakbuk, who supposed that the landlord had been sent by his wife to further their intrigue in some way. He set to work so quickly, not allowing himself a moment for food, that twenty beautifully cut and sewn shirts were ready by the evening. The landlord came down to the shop again and asked: "How much do I owe you?"; but just at that moment the young woman appeared secretly at the skylight and signed to Bakbuk with her eyes and brows not to accept any money from her husband. So Bakbuk refused any payment, although he was extremely poor at the time and the smallest coin would have meant much to him. Yet the ass thought himself very lucky to be able to work for the husband for the love and bright eyes of the wife.

That was only the beginning of my infatuated brother's trials. Next morning the landlord came again and handed a new roll of silk to Bakbuk, saying: "They tell me at home I must have some new trousers to go with the new shirts; so I have brought you the stuff. Let them be plenty large enough, do not stint the stuff, and use the finest needlework." "I hear and I obey!" answered my brother; and for three whole days he worked fasting so as to lose no time and also because there was not a single dirham in the house to buy food with. When he had finished the fine new trousers, he folded them together and carried them joyfully upstairs to the landlord.

It is unnecessary to tell a person of your sagacity, O Commander of the Faithful, that the young woman was in league with her husband to make a laughing-stock of my unfortunate brother and to play him every trick that she could think of. When the landlord had received the trousers, he pretended to want to pay for them; but just at the right moment the pretty head of his wife appeared round the door and signed again to the tailor to refuse. So Bakbuk said that he would take no sort of payment. The husband withdrew for a moment to confer with his wife and then returned, saying: "As my wife and I feel that we must repay your splendid services in some way, we have determined to marry you to our white slave girl that you may become in some sort one of the family. She is both beautiful and submissive." My witless Bakbuk thought that this was a clever ruse of the wife to give him free entry to the house, so he accepted without hesitation and was married straightway to the young slave.

When evening came Bakbuk wished to approach his bride, but she said: "No, no, it cannot be tonight," and he was not able to take even a kiss from her.

Usually Bakbuk slept in the shop, but that night it had been arranged that the couple should sleep in the mill room, as it was larger; so that, when the slave refused to let him lie with her and went upstairs again to her mistress, my brother was obliged to sleep in that unpleasant place alone. In the morning he was awakened by the loud voice of the miller saying: "Devil take the bullock! He has had a great deal of rest lately. Now I must harness him up to grind all the accumulated store of corn. My customers will be wanting their flour today." Then, feigning to take my brother for the bullock, he said: "Up lazy one! Come and be harnessed!" and with that he fastened the dumbfounded Bakbuk by the middle to the pole of the mill and gave him a great blow with the whip, crying: "Yallah!" Feeling the whip stinging about his loins, my brother began to low like a bullock and started to turn the mill. For a long time the miller thonged him on and Bakbuk trotted round and round, lowing dismally and snuffling between the blows just as a bullock does.

In course of time the landlord came down to see what was happening. Satisfied that the plan was going well, he returned to his wife who sent the slave girl down to my brother. By this time the miller had disappeared, so the young girl unfastened Bakbuk from the mill, saying in tones of the deepest concern: "My mistress begs me to say that she has just heard of the abominable mistake which has been made. She is desolated and so am I.'' The unhappy bridegroom was so exhausted by the blows and the unusual labour that he could not answer a word.

The slave girl left him alone and soon the clerk who had drawn up the marriage contract appeared and saluted him, saying: ''Allah grant you a long life and a fortunate marriage! You seem to have passed the happiest of nights, with amusing and intimate embraces I am sure, sweet kisses and embraces from night till day.'' ''Allah confound such lying snakes, O thousandfold traitor!'' answered my brother. ''Your contract has caused me to turn a mill all night.'' The clerk asked for details of this singular thing and, when he had heard them, said: ''I understand it all. Your star does not agree with the star of the young woman.'' ''Wretch!'' cried Bakbuk. ''Get out of this and play your dirty tricks elsewhere!'' Then he went up to his shop and began to work sorrowfully to make a little money, he who had worked so joyfully for love.

While he was sitting sewing the white slave came down to him and said: ''My mistress desires you madly. She bids me say that she is about to mount on the terrace for the pleasure of looking at you through the skylight.'' At the same moment Bakbuk saw the face of the lady of his love all bathed in tears appearing at the skylight. She wept, saying: ''My dear, my darling, why will you not look at me? Why will you not smile at me? I swear that I was in no way privy to what happened in the mill. As for this foolish slave, I beg that you will not honour her even with one glance. I and I only shall be yours, my love.'' She spoke so sweetly that Bakbuk at last lifted his head and gazed fully at her. Then were all his trials forgotten and his eyes were filled with joy by looking on her charms. They spoke a little together and soon he began to think that his misfortunes had happened to someone else.

Bakbuk continued to work assiduously in his own place, sewing shirts and trousers, under- and over-garments, for many hours a day in the hope of seeing his fair tormentor again. One day the slave girl returned, saying: "My mistress greets you and would have you know that my master will be away all night at a feast given by one of his friends. She will wait you with loving impatience and will lie with you all night in delicious love and amusement." Hearing this my all too simple brother thought that he was already in Paradise.

Now you must know that the graceless young woman had conceived a plan with the help of her husband to get rid of my brother and so to avoid all payment for the work he had done for them. The landlord had said to his wife: "How can we persuade him to visit you, so that I can surprise him and send him up before the wali?" And the wife had answered: "Leave it to me and I shall so deceive and compromise him that he shall be shamed throughout all the city."

To think that they should have been at such pains to do him hurt and the poor fool guess nothing of it! Alas, alas, he knew little of women!

When evening came the slave girl led Bakbuk to her mistress who smiled on him, saying: "As Allah lives, my master, I burn to have you near me!" "And I burn, too," said Bakbuk. "Let us be quick, first to kiss and then . . ." He had not time to finish his sentence before the door opened and the husband rushed in with two black slaves, who fell upon my brother, bound him, threw him to the floor, and belaboured his back with whips. But that was only the beginning; when he had been well trounced, they took him upon their shoulders and carried him before the wali who condemned him to the following punishment: after two hundred stripes had been laid on with rods, he was to be hoisted on the back of a camel and led through all the streets of Baghdad, preceded by a public crier who should announce in a loud voice: "Thus shall adulterers be punished!"

This sentence was carried out; and during the procession the camel became unmanageable and began to make great jumps about the street. Bakbuk was thrown to the earth and broke his leg; since then he has always walked with a limp. Further, the wali banished him and he was forced to drag his broken limb away from the city. But just in the nick of time, Commander of the Faithful, I was told of what had happened; so I ran after him and brought him back secretly to the city. Since then I have cured him at my own charges and kept him in food and raiment.

When the khalifat, Montaser Billah heard this story of Bakbuk, my masters, he rolled on his throne in laughter, calling out: "A capital tale and a capital teller!" "I hardly deserve such praise as yet," I answered, "though you may be able to say somewhat of the same truthfully when you have heard the stories of all my other brothers. Only I am afraid that you may think me talkative or indiscreet." "Far from it," answered the khalifat, "hasten to tell me all about your other brothers, that each tale may adorn my ears as with gold rings. Also, do not fear to dwell upon all the details, for I am sure that they will be very savoury and delicious." Then I told him:

THE TALE OF AL-HADDAR, THE BARBER'S SECOND BROTHER

Know, O Prince of the Faithful, that my second brother is called Al-Haddar, because he continually lows like a camel. He is broken-mouthed and used to do absolutely nothing for his livelihood. Much trouble has he put me to with his scrapes among women. Listen to one out of a thousand of them.

One day while he was walking aimlessly through the streets of Baghdad he saw an old woman coming towards him, who said in a low voice: "Listen, my man, I have an offer to make you which you can accept or refuse as you think fit." "Tell me what it is," said my brother stopping. "I will not make the proposition," the old woman continued, "unless you promise not to tattle or talk too much." "You may speak," said Haddar. Then the old woman whispered: "What would you say to a fair palace set about with running waters and fruit trees, where wine flowed from goblets ever full, where faces of ravishing beauty surrounded you, cheeks smooth for kisses, small pliant waists for holding, and supreme joys till morning? You shall taste of all these things if you agree to a condition." "But," said my brother, "why should you have come with this offer to me of all the sons of men? What quality is there in me that I should be preferred before all others." "I have just told you," she answered, "neither to talk, nor tattle, nor be indiscreet. Follow me and ask no questions."

The old woman led my brother, licking his lips at all the delights that were promised him, until they came to a magnificent palace. Entering, my brother found that the inside was even more splendid than the outside and the furnishing most grand of all. His guide led him up to the second storey and introduced him to a group of four young girls, who lay in flower-like beauty upon carpets, singing such songs as would have melted rocks.

After greetings, the fairest of them rose and filling a cup with wine, drank it off. "May that be delicious in its going down!" said my brother Haddar, wishing above all to be polite, and went on his knees to bear away the cup. But the girl filled it again, handed it to my brother and bade him drink. While he did so, the girl began to caress his neck, more with violence than with love, and finished by giving it a slap with the palm of her hand. Haddar was angry at this and, forgetting his promise, made as if to leave the place. But the old woman came near and winked, as much as to say: "Stay and wait the end." My brother controlled himself and underwent with the best possible grace all the young girl's antics. She pricked him, pinched him, and slapped his neck as if she hated him; while her three friends rivalled her in being disagreeable. One pulled his ears, one flicked him very painfully, and the third did nothing but pinch his flesh with her nails. As the old woman was signing to him all the time to keep silent, my brother supported these things and at last as a reward the first young woman rose up and bade him undress himself quite naked. This Haddar did and, when all his clothes were off, the girl sprinkled him with rose-water, saying: "I find you very much to my liking; but I cannot abide either beard or moustache in a man who kisses me. They prick my tender skin. If you want to possess me, you must have your face shaved." "That would be great shame," he answered. "I cannot love you otherwise, so you must," said the young girl. So my brother allowed himself to be conducted into a neighbouring room by the old woman, who there shaved off his beard, moustaches, and eyebrows. Afterwards she made up his face with red and white and brought him back to the young women, who were so struck by his appearance that they fell over backwards and rolled laughing on the floor.

The first and fairest of them said: "Master, now have all these many charms conquered my soul. I have but one more favour to ask of you: dance elegantly before your servants in all your natural beauty." Haddar held back at first, but when she begged him on her life to do it and made him fair promises, he gave in. Wrapping some silk about his loins he danced before them all to the rhythm of a darabuka played, by the old woman.

The girls laughed at him as if their sides would burst and pelted him with everything that came to hand; cushions, fruit, wine, and even wine jars. The ripe fruit spilled its juices where it struck. The wine dissolved the red and white.

Only when they were tired was the last part of the entertainment allowed to begin. The first girl stood up and began to take off her clothes one by one, posing all the time she did so and giving my brother passionate side-long glances. When nothing remained but her fine chemise and baggy silk drawers, Haddar stopped his dance, crying: "Allah, Allah!"

The old woman came up to him and said: "Now you must run after the dear young lady and catch her. It is her custom when heated by dance and wine to undress and favor only him whose bare limbs she can see and who is an agile runner. You must pursue her from room to room, showing that you are a man, until you catch her. That is the only way.

My brother, after some hesitation, cast aside his loin-cloth and made ready for the race. The girl appeared like a young palm tree which moves a little under the west wind. Then speechless with laughter she began to run and Haddar chased her twice round the hall, filled with desire.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and descreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that the tailor told the king of China the rest of the tale which the barber of Baghdad had related to the guests about his second brother, Haddar, and which had been in the first place told to the khalifat Montaser Billah in these words:

Haddar, panting with shortness of breath and most desirous, ran round and round after the light and laughing girl. The other three and the old woman, seeing his face painted and quite hairless and the contortions of his limbs, laughed as if their sides would break, clapping their hands and stamping on the floor.

The girl fled through a long gallery and in and out of many rooms always followed by my panting brother and his pursuing desire. She tripped easily along, laughing with all her teeth and swaying her haunches provocatively.

At length she slipped through a certain door and my brother found himself in a dark chamber where he could no longer see her. He ran on and suddenly the floor gave way beneath him; so that in another moment he found himself falling headlong into the street of the leather-sellers of Baghdad. When these good fellows saw Haddar appear among them, shaven, naked, and with his face all ruddled like a harlot's, they hooted at him and began thrashing him with their skins until he fell down in a faint. Laughing robustly, they set him on an ass and made a procession with him round all the markets. Finally they carried him to the wali, who said: "Who is this?" "He fell among us," they answered, "through a trap in the house of the grand wazir. He was like this when he did so." The wali then ordered Haddar to receive a hundred lashes on the soles of his feet and to be driven from the city.

I followed him in his exile, Commander of the Faithful, and, bringing him back secretly, hid him in a safe place. Since then he has lived at my expense: and you can judge for yourself my qualities of courage and generosity in paying out good money for such a fool.

The story of my third brother is very different as you shall hear.

THE TALE OF BAKBAK, THE BARBER'S THIRD BROTHER

Bakbak, or the swollen Clucker, is my third brother. He is blind and counted among the chief of the brotherhood of beggars in Baghdad. One day Allah led him to beg at the door of a great house, on which he beat with his stick demanding alms in the usual fashion and calling out: "Giver! Generous one!" Now I must tell you, O Commander of the Faithful, that my brother Bakbak, who was the cleverest of all the beggars, had a way when he knocked at a door of not answering any voice which cried: "Who is there?" He used to keep quiet until someone came to open the door, knowing that if he said: "It is a beggar come for alms," that the people would not open the door, but would cry: "Allah have pity on you!" and let him go about his business.

So on that day when someone cried: "Who is there?" my brother did not answer. After a short time the door was opened by a man with such a cast of countenance that, if my brother had been able to see it, assuredly he would not have begged from him. But every man carries his destiny fastened about his neck.

The man said: "What do you want?" and Bakbak answered: "Some little thing in the name of Allah Almighty." "Are you blind?" questioned the man. "Master, I am blind and very poor," answered my brother. Then said the man: "Give me your hand and I will lead you." My brother stretched out his hand and the man led him up many stairs until they came out on to the high terrace. Bakbak, who was all out of breath, thought: "Surely he is going to give me the remnants of a great feast."

"What do you wish, blind man?" asked the owner of the house at length. "Alms for the love of Allah!" said my brother in surprise. "Allah open another door for you," jeered the householder. "O thing," said Bakbak, "could you not have given me that answer when we were below?" "O lower than the lowest," questioned the man, "why could you not answer when I called out to know who was there? Unless you want to be thrown down like a ball, get out of here, you sticky mess of misery!" My poor brother, blind as he was, had to go down alone. When he was twenty steps from the bottom his foot slipped and he fell down all the rest of the stairs, striking his head a terrible blow on the last step. He made his way down the street, complaining bitterly. Soon some of his companion beggars came round and asked the reason for his woe. He told them and added: "Now, my friends, I must go home and take a little money to buy food for this ill-omened day. I shall have to encroach on our savings which, as you know, are very great and have been put under my care."

Now all this time the man who had treated him so scurvily had been following my brother, unseen either by Bakbak or the two blind companions who had agreed to accompany him. He walked quietly behind them until they came to my brother's dwelling and, when the three had entered, slipped in after them before they had a chance to shut the door. When all were inside, Bakbak said to the other two: "First search the place well, in case a stranger is hidden anywhere." Hearing this suggestion the man, who was a professional thief held in high reputation among his brotherhood, seized a cord which was hanging from the ceiling and, climbing up it noiselessly, seated himself comfortably upon a beam. After the two blind men had thoroughly searched the chamber with their sticks, my brother uncovered the hidden store of money and the three come down to count it. When they found that it came to ten thousand dirhams, one of them took two or three of the coins and, while the others carefully hid the sacks again, hurried out and returned in a few minutes with three loaves, three onions, and some dates.

While they were eating the thief slid noiselessly down the cord, squatted beside them and began to eat also. My brother, whose hearing was very acute, became aware of a fourth pair of jaws working near him. So crying: "There is a stranger here!" he stretched out his hand and caught the robber's arm. All three threw themselves upon the thief and, blind as they were, belaboured him with their sticks, calling out all the time. "Thief! thief! Help, Mussulmans, help!" Many neighbours ran in and found the three blind men holding the struggling robber. When the latter saw that help had come he shut his eyes and, pretending to be blind, cried out: "By Allah, friends, I am a blind beggar, an associate of these three who are trying to kill me that they may keep my share of the ten thousand dirhams we have saved. I swear it by Allah, by the sultan, by the emir! Lead me, O lead me to the wali!"

At this moment the wali's guards came up and dragged all four before the minister. "What are these men?" asked the wali. The thief cried out: "Just and farseeing wali, listen to me and you shall hear the truth! And yet, and yet, how can I dare to hope that you will believe me until I have been put to the torture? Beat me first and then these others and we will tell the truth." "Throw that man down and beat him," said the wali, "as he is so anxious for it." On this the guard seized the pretended blind man and, while some held him spread-eagled, others rained great blows upon him with their whips. After the first ten strokes the man began to yell and opened one eye. After a few more he very deliberately opened the other.

Seeing this the angry wali cried: "What shame is this, O wicked trickster?" "Let me up and I will tell you all!" yelled the robber. So the wali bade the blows cease and the victim got to his feet, saying: "We are four men who pretend to be blind that we may extract alms and get into houses to look at women when they are undressed. Then we corrupt them and bend them to our wills and afterwards we steal from them and make plans of the houses for burglars. We have been doing this for a long time, so that now we have amassed as much as ten thousand dirhams between us. Today I asked for my share, but these other three refused to give it to me and were on the point of beating me to death when your guards came up and saved me. That is the whole truth, O wali, as my companions will confess when they have been well and truly beaten. Only do not spare their punishment, for they are hardy rogues and will keep their eyes shut for a long time."

Deceived by the wicked thief, the wali ordered my brother to be thrown down and beaten. In vain did he protest that he had been born blind; they showered blows upon him till he fainted. When he came to himself, he received three hundred strokes because he would not open his eyes and after that another three hundred. The same treatment was given to the other two, who also did not open their eyes in spite of the blows and the loud exhortations of their self-styled companion.

At last the wali sent the chief under guard to fetch all the money from Bakbak's house. He gave a quarter, that is to say two thousand five hundred dirhams, to the robber and kept the rest himself.

Then he addressed my brother and his two companions in this fashion: "Miserable imposters, you eat bread which is the gift of Allah and feign in His name that you are blind. Depart hence, and be never more seen in all Baghdad."

When I heard of what had happened, O Commander of the Faithful, I left the city to look for my brother Bakbak and, when I found him, brought him back secretly to Baghdad, where he now lives my eternal pensioner, dependent on me for lodging, food, and raiment.

That is the tale of my third brother, Bakbak the blind man.

The khalifat Montaser Billah laughed heartily at my recital and said: "Give this barber some money and let him depart!" But I answered: "As Allah lives, Commander of the Faithful, I could never accept aught at your hands until you have heard the stories of my other three brothers, well and concisely told, so that you may know that I am no babbler." "Be it so," said the khalifat, "I do not mind having my ears split by your harsh imbecilities, if it gives you any pleasure." So I told him:

THE TALE OF AL-KUZ, THE BARBER'S FOURTH BROTHER

My fourth brother, the one-eyed Al-Kuz of Assouan, the unbreakable jug, was a butcher in Baghdad. He was a famous meat seller and a successful breeder of fat-tailed sheep. He knew exactly for whom to reserve the best meat and on whom to palm off the worst, so that the largest buyers and richest merchants in the city dealt at no other shop, but bought his mutton exclusively; and it was not long before he became the rich owner of many flocks.

His prosperity lasted until a certain day when, as he was sitting in his shop, a tall white-bearded old man brought certain silver coins to him and asked for some of his best meat. My brother cut of his best, took the silver and thanked the old man, who promptly departed.

Al-Kuz, examining the money which he had received from the stranger, noticed that all the coins were new and of silver freshness, so he put them aside in a special coffer, saying: "These coins will bring me good luck."

Every day for five months the white-bearded old man bought excellent meat from my brother in exchange for more and more of these bright new pieces and every time Al-Kuz put them aside. One day, wishing to buy some fine sheep and certain rams which might be trained as fighters, a most popular sport in Baghdad, he began to count his money. But no sooner had he opened the chest in which he had stored the old man's coins than he found it filled only with little rounds of white paper. He beat himself about the face and head, weeping and wailing, and soon was the centre of a large crowd to whom he told the whole story. No one could suggest an explanation; but while my brother was gesticulating and shouting: "Would that the wicked old man might come, for me to tear his beard out and pull his turban off!" the stranger himself appeared and, clearing a path through the crowd, advanced towards my brother as if he would buy from him as usual. Al-Kuz fell upon him and gripped him tightly, crying: "Come quickly, O Mussulmans, here is the shameless thief!" The old man lost nothing of his great calm and, without attempting to escape, whispered: "Be silent or I will put you to public shame on a more terrible charge than you wish to bring against me." "What shame could you bring upon me, you black-souled old reprobate?" cried my brother. "I could prove," answered the old man, "that you sell people human flesh instead of mutton." "That is not true, son of a thousand lies!" yelled Al-Kuz. "What more wicked liar can there be," said the old man, "than he who at this moment has a corpse hung up on the hooks of his butcher's shop instead of a sheep?" "Dog and son of a dog," protested my brother, "if you can prove this thing against me my goods and my life are yours." Accepting the challenge, the old man turned to the crowd, crying at the top of his voice: "My friends, look at this butcher! He has deceived us all until this very day, and has sullied all the principles of the Sacred Book. Week in, week out, he has slain his brother men and sold their flesh to us as mutton. You have but to come inside his shop to see the truth of what I say."

The crowd rushed into my brother's shop with a yell, and lo, it seemed to all that the corpse of a man was hanging from one of the hooks, flayed and prepared, trimmed and gutted; while on the sheep's-head shelf three human heads lay skinned and trimmed and ready to be sold. The truth is that the old man with a long white beard was a sorcerer who by his enchantments was able to make men see what he wished them to see.

Thinking that they had really beheld this horrible sight, the crowd, crying out: "Sacrilege! Impious cheat!" threw themselves on my brother with sticks and whips, his oldest clients and best friends delivering the hardest blows. The old man contented himself with striking Al-Kuz violently in the left eye with his fist, so that the sight went from it for ever. Lifting down the supposed corpse to carry with them, they bound my brother and haled him before the emir. The old man made himself spokesman, saying: "My lord, we bring a terrible criminal to your justice, one who for many months has murdered his fellow-men and sold their bodies as mutton. You have but to pronounce sentence and let the justice of God proceed; for here are all the witnesses."

My brother tried to defend himself, but the judge, refusing to hear a word, sentenced him to receive five hundred blows of the stick on his back and buttocks. He confiscated all his goods and out-lawed him. Indeed, if he had not been so rich he could in no wise have escaped death.

Blind of one eye and nearly dead from the sticks, my brother left the city and journeyed straight ahead until he came to a far off and unknown town, where he set up as a cobbler in a very small way of business.

He made his shop in the angle of a wall at the corner of two streets and worked there for a living. One day, while he was sewing a piece into an old slipper, he heard the neighing of horses and the noise of many riders. Asking the reason for this and being told that the king and all his court were going hunting, my brother left his hammer and awl for a moment and rose to see the procession pass. While he stood there pensive and dreaming of his past and present, how from a famous butcher he had fallen to be the least of cobblers, the king passed at the head of a handsome troop and, happening to glance round, let his eye fall on the blind eye of Al-Kuz. The king changed colour, crying: "Allah preserve me from the evil eye and this unhappy day!" With that he turned his horse about and led all his followers back by the way they had come, not forgetting to order my brother to be seized and punished. Slaves fell upon Al-Kuz and, beating him, left him for dead in the road. When they had gone, my brother crawled painfully back to the shelter of the little awning with which he had roofed his corner and lay there, all broken with blows and nearer death than life. When one of the king's followers passed his retreat, he begged him to stop and, explaining the circumstances to him, asked the reason of his treatment. The man burst into fits of laughter, saying: "Brother, our king cannot bear the sight of a one-eyed man, especially should the blind eye be the left one. He says that it brings him ill-luck and always has the man killed. I cannot understand how you have escaped."

My brother delayed not a moment on hearing these words, but, collecting the few poor tools of his trade, dragged himself forth from that city and stumbled on until he came to another a long way off where there was neither king nor tyrant.

He stayed for a long time in this new place, taking care never to show himself out of doors; but one day, being sadder than ordinary, he went forth to taste the air and rejoice his sight with the bustle of his fellow-men. Suddenly he heard behind him the neighing of horses and, remembering the misfortunes which that sound had heralded before, fled away searching in vain for a place to hide. At last he saw a great door in front of him, which opened at his touch. He leapt across the threshold and found himself in a long dark corridor where he stood trembling. Hardly had he entered, however, when two men hurled themselves upon him and cast chains about him, saying: "Allah be praised that we have caught you at last, O enemy of God and man! Three days and three nights we have lain in wait for you, eschewing sleep and tasting thereby the bitterness of death." "But, good people," said my brother, "what thing is this that He has brought upon me?" "You are going about to kill the master of this house and us his servants. Was it not enough for you to make all his friends miserable and to ruin him, that you should now wish to kill him? Where is the knife with which you chased us yesterday?" With that they searched Al-Kuz and found his soling knife in his belt. They were about to strangle him, when he cried out: "Listen, good people, I am neither a thief nor a murderer. I will tell you my story if you let me up." But, instead of listening they searched him from head to foot, beat him, and, tearing away his clothes, saw the old marks of stick and whip upon his naked back. "Wretched criminal," they cried, "here are the marks of your old punishment, witness of other crimes!" Without more ado they haled my poor brother before the wali, and, as he went, Al-Kuz said bitterly to himself: "However great my sins may have been, surely they are now expiated. I have done nothing wrong and there is no help save in Allah."

The wali looked angrily on my brother, saying: "Shameless ill-doer, it is quite clear from these marks upon your back that you have practised every sort of crime and malversation." He had my brother given a hundred strokes with canes and hoisted on the back of a camel, in front of which criers went throughout all the city, calling: "Thus shall all be punished who enter other people's houses with criminal intent!"

The news of this series of calamities came to my ears, so that I set out to search for him and found him just at the moment when they were lifting him down in a swoon from the camel's back. I thought it my duty, Commander of the Faithful, to heal his hurts and bring him back in secret to Baghdad, where he lived eating and drinking in comfort at my expense.

That is the story of the unfortunate Al-Kuz. The tale of my fifth brother is an extrordinary one and will prove to you, Commander of the Faithful, how much wiser and more prudent I am than any of my relations.

THE TALE OF AL-ASHAR, THE BARBER'S FIFTH BROTHER

Prince of Believers, this tells of my brother who had his ears and nose split up. He was called Al-Ashar either because he was very fat, with a swagging belly like a gravid camel, or else because he was like a big pot. Whatever the reason, he was a very lazy man, making his little monies by doubtful enterprises in the night and lying up in the daytime. When our father died we each inherited a hundred dirhams in silver. Al-Ashar took his with the rest, but did not know what to do with it. At last, after turning over a thousand ideas, he decided to buy glass-ware and sell it retail, because such a trade does not require going to and fro.

So Al-Ashar became a glass merchant: he bought a great basket to hold his wares and installed himself at the corner of a much-frequented street. With his basket in front of him and his back propped up against the wall of a house, he would sometimes cry to the passers-by:

Glasses, glasses,
Blown drops of the sunrise,
Breasts of alabaster little girls,
Frozen breath of virgins under desire,
Eye-coloured of the fairest;
Glasses, glasses!

But more often he would sit dreaming in silence. On a certain Friday at about the hour of prayer he was day-dreaming to himself in this wise:

I have put all my capital into these glasses; they cost me a hundred dirhams and I shall certainly sell them for two hundred. With the two hundred I shall buy more glasses and sell for four hundred. I shall go on buying and selling till I have a large capital. Then I shall buy other kinds of goods, unguents and atars which should yield me enormous profits. With these profits I shall be able to afford myself a great palace with slaves and horses and saddles embroidered in gold. I will eat and drink; and there shall not be one singer in the city whom I do not bring into my palace to sing to me. I shall get into communication with the subtlest marriage-women of Baghdad and send them on my quests among the daughters of kings and of wazirs. But perhaps, if I can stoop so low, I will marry the daughter of the grand wazir, for I hear that she is as beautiful as dawn and excellently cultivated. I will give her a marriage portion of a thousand golden dinars; and if her father does not agree at once to the match, I will carry her off from underneath his nose and ravish her to my palace. I will buy ten little eunuchs for my own service and dress myself more royally than any king. The most skilful jeweller I can find shall make me a golden saddle encrusted with diamonds and pearls, and I shall set this on a marvellous horse bought from the Bedouins of the desert. Then I shall ride through the city with hundreds of slaves about me, behind me, and before me, and so come to the grand wazir's palace. He will rise up at my coming and give me his own seat, standing below me in humility because I have honoured him by marrying his daughter. Two of my little slaves shall carry great purses with a thousand dinars in each; one I shall hand to my father-in-law as the marriage portion and the other I shall give him as a simple present to show my generosity, my high-mindedness, and my little care for money. Gravely I shall return to my own house and when my bride-to-be sends some woman to me with her greetings, I shall overwhelm the visitor with gold and a gift of the richest robes and fabrics. If the wazir sends me a marriage gift I will not accept but return it to him, however valuable it may be, just that he may know I have a lofty soul and am incapable of meanness. I will fix the marriage day and all the details of the ceremony myself and give orders that no expense shall be spared. I will choose the number and quality of the musicians, the singers male and female, and the dancers. My palace shall be spread with carpets and its floors strewn with flowers from the door even to the feast-hall. All the marble shall be washed with rose-water and essences of delight.

On the night itself I shall dress in my most sumptuous clothes and show myself to the people seated upon a throne, set on a dais, hung with silk stuffs, bearing pictures of flowers and coloured lines subtly placed. During all the time of the ceremony and of my wife's walking the hall, shining in beauty like the full moon of Ramadan, I shall stay motionless with impassive face, neither looking at her nor turning my head to right nor left. So shall men know that I am wise and grave. My wife will be brought before me in the freshness of her beauty and the charm of mingled perfumes; but I will not move. Gravely indifferent, I will sit there until all the women come round me, crying: "Master and crown of our heads, here is your wife, your slave, standing respectfully before you waiting for you to delight her with a look. She is tired with standing and has no other hope but that you will order her to sit down." I shall answer never a word until all the women and all the guests have thrown themselves down, kissing the ground before my greatness. Then only will I lower my eyes and look upon my wife just once; after a single glance I will raise my head again and resume my air of magnificent unconcern. The slaves will take my wife away for the second robing and, in the meanwhile, I will come down from my place and change my garments for richer ones. They will bring my wife before me a second time, dressed in other robes and other tires, lost beneath a mass of gold-set jewels and perfumed with other and sweeter scents. I will wait till they beg me to look at her and, just when she thinks I am about to do so, will raise my eyes to the ceiling. This I will do till all the ceremonies are over.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirty-second Night
Had Come

she continued her tale to King Shahryar in these words:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the barber, told the rest of the story of his fifth brother, Al-Ashar in these words:

. . . until all the ceremonies are over. Then I shall order some of my little slaves to take a purse containing five hundred dinars worth of small money and scatter handfuls of it about the hall, among the musicians and singers and all my wife's attendants. Then the slaves will lead the bride to the marriage-chamber and there will I go myself, after making them wait a long time for me. When I enter, I shall walk, without looking at her, between the two poised lines of women and, seating myself on the couch, call for a cup of perfumed and scented water. This I will drink calmly, giving thanks to God.

I will take no notice of my wife stretched on the bed ready to receive me. To humble her and let her know how little I think of her, I will not say one word. This will teach her how I intend to use her in the future; for if you would have women sweet and docile it is as well to begin as you mean to end. Soon the bride's mother will come in, kissing my head and hands and saying: "Master, deign to regard your slave, my daughter, who ardently desires the alms of a single speech." In spite of these respectful words I will not answer the woman; nor will she dare to call me son-in-law for fear of seeming familiar. She will continue to supplicate and at last throwing herself down will kiss my feet and the hems of my robe, saying: "Master, I swear by Allah that this child of mine is beautiful and a virgin. I swear by Him that no man has ever seen her face or knows the colour of her eyes. Cease then from humbling her like this. Behold she is submissive and sweet; and waits only a sign to satisfy you in all things."

My wife's mother will rise and, filling a cup with rare old wine, give it to her daughter, who will offer it to me with a trembling hand. Leaning carelessly upon my elbow among the gold-sewn velvet cushions of the bed, I will let her offer it to me and, without looking at her, I shall take much pleasure in thinking that she, the daughter of the grand wazir, stands before the glass merchant who used to cry his wares at the street corners:

Glasses, glasses,
Blown drops of the sunrise,
Breasts of alabaster little girls,
Frozen breath of virgins under desire,
Eye-coloured of the fairest;
Navels of small sweethearts,
Hardened spun honey;
Glasses, glasses!

Standing before so much nobility and grandeur she cannot but take me for the son of some illustrious sultan whose glory filled the world. Weeping she will say: "Have mercy, my lord, do not refuse this cup or put away the hands of your servant. I am even as the lowest of your slaves." I will not answer her and when, becoming a little bold in the face of my silence, she comes nearer with the wine-cup and puts it sweetly to my lips, I will become furious at so much familiarity; I will look at her terribly, and, giving her a great slap in the face, will kick her violently in the belly like this . . .

So saying my brother launched a violent kick at the wife of his dreams, which took the fragile basket of glasses full in the centre and sent all the contents crashing in pieces to the ground. If I had been there at the moment, Commander of the Faithful, I would have beaten that mad brother of mine for the false grandeur and excessive vanity which had lost him his little fortune! Al-Ashar began to beat his face with great blows and tear his garments, weeping and wailing as the folk went by to the midday prayer. Some stopped and pitied him; others went on bursting with laughter when they had heard from bystanders the extravagant details of the accident.

While my brother sat moaning the loss of his capital and all the fine interest of which he had dreamed, a well-born lady passed on her way to the mosque for Friday prayer. She out-did the fairest with her loveliness; a lively odour of the rarest musk floated about her and she rode on a mule whose harness was of velvet and gold brocade. She was accompanied by many servants and slaves, one of which in her tenderness of heart she sent to inquire the reason of my brother's despair. When she heard that the poor man had upset his basket in which all his wealth was represented by brittle glass, she told one of her servants to give Al-Ashar all the money which he carried. The servant took a great purse from about his neck and gave it to my brother, who found inside five hundred golden dinars. He nearly died for joy and gratitude, calling down all the blessings and mercies of Allah on his helper until she was out of sight.

Having thus become rich in the twinkling of an eye, my brother hurried to his house, his breast swelling with pleasure, to hide away his fortune. He was on the point of setting out again to find some mansion in which he might live at ease, when he heard a gentle knocking at the door. He rose and, opening, found an old woman on the threshold whom he had never seen before. "My son," she said, "the time for prayer on this holy Friday is almost passed and I have not yet been able to make the ablutions necessary before praying. I beg you to let me come in for a moment and make the necessary washings out of reach of prying eyes." "Certainly you may do so," said my brother, and, leading the old woman in, he conducted her to the kitchen where he left her alone.

A few minutes later the old woman appeared before my brother in his room and, taking up her position on a thread-bare piece of matting which served him as a carpet, she made a few hasty genuflexions and finished her prayer by calling down the best blessing from on high upon her entertainer, in excellent heartfelt phrases. My brother, who was bursting, as it were, with happiness, thanked her for her prayers and, taking two gold dinars from his belt, offered them to her. The old woman pushed them back with dignity, crying: "My child, Allah be thanked that He has made you so generous. It does not surprise me that you can so quickly inspire sympathy in other people, even when, like myself, they have only seen you once. But put this money back in your belt, for you seem a poor man who needs it more than I do. If you are determined to get rid of it, why not return it to the noble lady who gave it to you when she saw that you had broken all your glasses?" "What, do you know that woman, good mother?" asked Al-Ashar. "In that case, I beg you of your kindness to tell me how I may see her again." "My son," said the old trot, "that very beautiful young woman only gave you the money to express a liking that she had taken to your youth and vigorous good looks. Her husband is most unsatisfactory. He has lost all his youthful force and indeed in his palmiest days of his young manhood he was but lukewarm. Rise up now, my boy, put all your gold in your belt, lest it should be stolen from this unprotected house and follow me. I have been in the young lady's service for a long time and carry out all her secret commissions. My advice is that when you are once in her presence you should go to it roundly with gentle words but with your lustiest deeds. The more pressing you are, the better will she love you. She will stint you of no pleasure, but put all her beauty and wealth at your disposition."

My brother rose and followed the old woman until they came to a great doorway on which the latter knocked in a peculiar fashion, while Al-Ashar stood beside her in an ecstasy of impatience. The door was opened by a young and pretty Greek slave who welcomed my brother with a charming smile. He followed the old woman into the house and the little Greek introduced him into a great and splendidly furnished hall, hung with silk curtains, finely sewn in gold, and very richly carpeted. Finding himself alone, he sat down on a diwan and, taking off his turban which he held on his knees, wiped his forehead and waited. Almost immediately the curtains parted and a girl, incomparable in the dazzled sight of all men, and dressed to confound the imagination of poets, entered the apartment.

Al-Ashar rose as the girl smiled at him with her eyes and shut the door which had been left open. Coming to my brother she took his hand and led him to a couch of golden velvet. Al-Ashar, mindful of the old woman's instructions, spoke gently to her and with honeyed words. Then he saluted her lips, first in ceremonious greeting and then in forthright fashion. . . . An hour thus passed like the tiniest, hurrying second. The young woman rose and, saying to my brother: "Eye of my heart, do not move till I return," quickly left the chamber.

Suddenly the door was burst open violently and there rushed in a horrible negro with eyes of fire, holding a sword which shot forth blinding lightnings. "Woe on you, wretch!" he cried to the terrified Al-Ashar, "how have you dared to sneak into this house, son of a whore, child of adultery, mingled spawn from the rotting eggs of a host of criminals?" Hearing these violent words my brother did not know what to answer. His tongue sickened in his mouth, his muscles died within him, and he turned yellow. The negro gripped him and, stripping him naked, thrashed him twenty-four times about the body with the flat of the sword to prolong his punishment; then stabbed him in several places so that he fell to the earth and the negro thought him dead. The black man called out in a terrible voice and immediately a negress ran in with a plate of salt. Laying the plate on the ground, she filled all my brother's wounds with salt; but he bore the terrible agony lest they should kill him if he cried out. When all Al-Ashar's body had been treated with salt, the negro gave a second horrible cry and the old woman appeared, who helped him to search my brother's belt and clothes and took away his gold. Then she gripped him by the feet and dragged him through the rooms to a courtyard where there was an opening in the stone floor. Below this was a dark cellar where it was her habit to throw the corpses of all those lovers whom she enticed in to her mistress. They would be stripped and robbed and their bodies covered with salt so that they should not putrify. Into this terrible place she threw my brother alive but not seeming to breathe.

The cellar was very high and full of shadows; bodies lay piled there one on top of the other as they had fallen. For two days Al-Ashar remained among the dead, being unable to move because of his wounds and his fall; but Allah (praise and glory to Him) saw to it that the salt pickling which he had undergone was the means of saving his life, for it prevented his wounds from suppurating and staunched the flow of blood. When his hurts were fairly healed and his strength had come back to him a little he managed to climb over the bodies and make his way along the cellar, guided by a feeble light that showed at the end of it. Groping his way forward he found a little skylight high in the wall of the cellar. With infinite pain he hoisted himself through this and stood once more in the light of day.

He hastened as fast as he could to his own house and there I found him. I cured him completely with certain remedies which I know how to extract from plants and vegetable saps; and soon he was able to plan a punishment for the old woman and the others. First he hunted for the old woman and, getting on her track, made himself acquainted with the haunts to which she proceeded every day for the purpose of finding young men to satisfy her mistress and endure the after fate. When he was sure of his ground, he disguised himself as a Persian. Filling the pouch of his belt with fragments of glass as if it were bursting with gold and hiding a great sword under his long Persian robe he waited until the old woman came and then approaching her, said in an imitation of the barbarous accent with which a Persian speaks Arabic: "Good mother, I am a stranger in this city. Can you tell me where I may find a pair of scales to weigh these nine hundred golden dinars which I have in my belt, the sum which I have just obtained for the goods which I brought from my own country?" "You have come to the right person, my young friend," answered the wicked old woman. "My son, who is just such another handsome young man as yourself, is a money-changer by profession and would gladly lend you his scales. Come, I will lead you to his house." After thanking her, my brother followed her until he was led again to the ill-omened house. The same young Greek opened the door with a charming smile and the old woman whispered to her: "I bring solid muscle and fat meat today." The slave took Al-Ashar by the hand and led him into the silken hall. There she left him and went to fetch her mistress, who came in a few moments and did with my brother all that she had done on the first occasion. It is useless to repeat it here. Then she retired as before and suddenly the terrible negro appeared with the naked sword in his hand, who abused him more foully than the first time and bade him follow. When my brother was behind the negro he whipped his own sword from beneath his robe and with a single stroke cut off the black man's head. The negress with the salt ran in at the sound of the fall and was killed instantly in the same way; then the Greek slave rushed in and her head fell beside the rest. Lastly the old woman hurried up, ready to lay her hands on the booty, but, seeing my brother with bloody arms and sword in hand, she fell to the ground in terror. Al-Ashar seized her by the hair, crying: "Old woman, daughter of a strumpet, corrupt misfortune, do you recognise me?" "I do not, my master," whimpered the old woman. "Know, old lewd creature," shouted my brother, "that I am the man whose house you came to do your washings and whom you led to this place before, old ape. Yes, I am he whom you dragged by the legs and threw into the cellar." So saying, he cut the old woman into two pieces and, leaving her, set out to find the young woman who had twice met him.

Soon he found her, tittivating and scenting herself in a far chamber. She threw herself at his feet with a terrified cry, begging my brother to spare her life. Remembering the pleasures which she had given him, he pardoned her and said: "What are you doing in this house, in the power of that terrible negro whom I have just killed with my own hand? Surely the life you have led with him has been full of horrors?" "Master," she answered, "before I was shut up in this wicked house I was in the family of a rich merchant of this city. The old woman often used to come to see us and singled me out especially as a favourite. One day she came to me saying: 'I have been invited to a marriage feast the like of which the world has never seen. I come to take you with me.' Accepting with pleasure, I put on the most beautiful dresses that I had and taking with me a purse of a hundred dinars went out with the old woman. She led me to this house and once here I fell beneath the hands and power of the negro who, after ravishing me, kept me by force and made me a party to his crimes on the bodies of the rich young men the old woman brought to him. For three years I have been a tool and slave to that wicked old hag." "Unfortunate woman," said my brother, "surely in all this time you must have found where these criminals stored their great wealth?" "Indeed I have," she answered, "and there is so much that not ten men could carry it away. Come and see for yourself." With that she shewed my brother great chests filled with the money of all lands and purses of every fashion. As he stood dumb before such vast wealth, she said to him: "There is no way in which we can carry off all this gold. Go out and return with many porters. In the meanwhile I will make the gold up into bundles."

My brother went forth in haste and returned after a certain time with ten strong men each carrying an empty case.

But, on arriving at the house, he found the door wide open and both the girl and the great chests of money gone. He understood how she had tricked him, in order to keep the greater part of the money to herself; but even so he was well enough pleased with all the beautiful things which remained in the house; valuables shut away in presses and furnishings which alone would make him rich for the rest of his days. Telling himself that he would remove all these things on the morrow, my brother, who was broken by the fatigue of his adventure, lay down on the rich bed and slept.

Waking in the morning, he was terrified to find himself surrounded by twenty of the wali's guards who said: "Rise up, and come with us to our master, for he requires you." They shut and sealed the doors and led Al-Ashar to the wali who regarded him sternly, saying: "I have heard all the story of the murders which you have committed and the theft which you meditated." "Wali," cried my brother, "give me the sign of mercy and I will tell you all the truth!" The wali handed him the little kerchief of pardon and my brother told him all his adventures from beginning to end, adding: "Now if you wish it, O just and resourceful wali, we shall share what remains in the house on equal terms." "Do you dare to speak of sharing?" cried the wali, "By Allah, I will have it all and you nothing. You may think yourself lucky to escape with your life. As it is, you must leave the city and never return, unless you wish to pay the last penalty." Thus the wali, fearing that the khalifat might hear of his appropiation of the money, exiled my brother and he was obliged to leave the city on the instant. That his destiny might be fulfilled he had hardly got beyond the gates when he was set upon by brigands who, finding that he had neither valuables nor money on him, took his clothes, beat him severely and, to pay themselves for their disappointment, cropped his ears and split his nose up.

When I heard of the misfortunes of poor Al-Ashar, O Commander of the Faithful, I went forth and rested not until I found him. I took him into my house, cared for him and cured him; finally I made him an allowance of food and drink for the rest of his days.

That is the tale of Al-Ashar.

The story of my sixth and last brother so merits attention that I will tell it at once, without pausing for breath.

THE TALE OF SHAKALIK, THE BARBER'S SIXTH BROTHER

He was called Shakalik, the broken pot, O Commander of the Faithful; and he was that one of my brothers who had his lips cut off and was multilated as the result of certain extraordinary adventures.

He was the poorest of us all; he was always poor. I say nothing of the hundred dirhams which he, like us, inherited from my father; for Shakalik, never having seen so much money in his life, rioted it away in a single night with the terrible roisterers of the left quarter of Baghdad.

He possessed none of the vain riches of this perishable world and lived on the alms of people who received him at their houses for the sake of his jokes and witty sayings.

One day Shakalik went out to search for some food with which to sustain his starving body, and found himself at length in front of a magnificent house which had a great portico raised upon many steps. On these steps came and went a crowd of servants and young slaves, officers and porters. My brother approached one of these and asked him who was the owner of so fair a house. "It belongs to one of the royal family of the Barmaki," answered the man. Hearing this, my brother went up the steps and solicited alms in the name of Allah from certain porters who sat on a great bench in the entrance. "Where can you come from," one of them said to him, "not to know that you have but to go in to our master and be loaded with gifts?" So Shakalik went through the great door and crossed the spacious courtyard and the garden which was full of singing birds and fair trees. The courtyard was paved with alternate squares of black and white marble, and the garden more beautifully kept than any other which eye of man had seen. Round the two there rose a day-gallery paved with marble and shaded with silk curtains which kept it cool from the heat of noon. My brother went on and entered the principal hall, which was built of porcelain tiles coloured blue, green and gold, with laced leaves and flowers; and had in its centre a fair alabaster basin from which cool water fell with a sweet jargoning. A marvellously coloured mat carpetted the higher part of the floor and upon it, among cushions of gold silk, reposed a handsome old man with a long white beard and a benevolent smile. Shakalik advanced towards the full-bearded ancient, saying: "Peace be with you!" The old man rose and answered: "Peace be with you, together with the clemency and blessing of Allah! What do you wish, my friend?" "I only ask an alms, master; for I am dying of hunger," said my brother.

Hearing thus of my brother's misfortune, the old man expressed great compassion and an excessive grief, tearing his robe and crying: "By Allah, is it possible that I should be in a city and there should be also in it a man so hungry as you are? This is a thing that I cannot well bear!" Raising his hands to heaven, my brother cried: "Allah bless your goodness and your posterity for ever!" Then said the old man: "There is nothing for it but that you stay here and share my meal with me, eating the salt of my cloth." "I thank you, master," said my brother, "for I can fast no more." The old man clapped his hands and said to a slave who came to this summons: "Make haste! Bring the silver ewer and basin that we may wash our hands!" Then to Shakalik: "Come here and wash your hands, my guest."

So saying, the old man rose and, although the boy had not returned, made a movement as if he were pouring the water upon his hands from an invisible ewer and then drying them as if they had been really wet. Shakalik did not know what to think of this, but, as the old man insisted, he supposed it must be some sort of joke; so, being himself renowned for humour, he went through all the movements of hand-washing as the old man had done. When he had finished his host called out: "Come you others, spread the cloth quickly and let us eat; for this poor man is hungry." Numerous servants ran in and made a great running to and fro as if they were spreading a cloth and covering it with many meats and groaning dishes. Although Shakalik was at the extreme of hunger, he said to himself that the poor have to enter into the caprices of the rich and schooled himself not to show the least sign of impatience. So when the old man said: "Seat yourself by my side, dear guest, and hasten to do honour to my entertainment," my brother sat down by him at the edge of the imaginary cloth. The old man moved his hands about as if he were touching dishes and taking samples from them: also he moved his jaws and lips as if chewing. Soon he said to my brother: "O guest, my house is your house, and my cloth your cloth. Fall to, then, and eat your fill without any shame! Just look at this bread, is it not excellently white and baked to a turn? I shall like your opinion of this bread." "It is the whitest bread I have ever seen," said Shakalik, "and I have never tasted the like in all my life." "I can believe it," said his host. "The negress who baked it is the cleverest of her kind. I had to pay five hundred gold dinars for her. Now try a little of this dish; see how golden it lies there, this excellent pasty of buttered *kaybayba!* Believe me, my cook has spared neither good red mince, nor bruised corn, nor cardamoms, nor pepper. Eat, my poor starved friend, and tell me what you think of the taste, the smell, the soul of it?" "This *kaybayba* melts against my lips;" replied my brother, "its perfume fills my breast. I will be bold to say that never has such a *kaybayba* been cooked even in kings' palaces." To give effect to his words, Shakalik began to move his jaws, to chew and swallow, and shake his cheeks as if he were eating. "What you say pleases me very much, dear guest," continued the old man, "yet I do not think that what you have tasted so far of my cooking deserves so high a eulogy, else what will you have left to say about these dishes on your left; these heavenly roast chickens, stuffed with pistachios, almonds, rice, raisins, pepper, cinnamon and paste of lamb? Their aroma, my friend, their aroma!" "Allah be good to us," said my brother, "never was such an aroma! The birds are the soul of all savoury and their stuffing a poem." Said the old man: "You display a well-bred indulgence to my kitchen, very gratifying to me. Now, if I may, I will give you a mouthful of this other dish with my own fingers." With that he made as if to roll a mouthful from an invisible dish and popped the imperceptible dainty into my brother's mouth, saying: "Eat that, dear guest, and give me your opinion on these stuffed egg-apples and their tittilating sauce." My brother reached forward his lips, opened his mouth, and took a great swallow. Then with closed eyes, he said: "As Allah lives, it is perfection! I say, without fear of contradiction, that never elsewhere have I tasted such egg-apples. In the stuffing I detect the hand of an artist; the shredded lamb, the chick-peas, the pine kernels, the cardamom seeds, the nutmeg, the cloves, the ginger, the pepper, and the various aromatic herbs: I taste them as a whole and I taste them separately, so exquisite is the blending." "My dear friend," said the old man, "that being the case I shall be infinitely obliged if you will eat all the forty-four stuffed egg-apples on this plate." "Nothing is easier," replied my brother, "they are sweeter than the nipples of my nurse and tickle my palate like the fingers of little girls." Then Shakalik made as if he lifted and swallowed each of the forty-four in turn, nodding his head and clicking his tongue with delight. All the time the poor fellow's mind dwelt on all this food as it was mentioned and he became so ravenous that he would willingly have died for a dried bean-cake or lump of maze bread. At the same time he was careful not to betray his feelings.

Soon the old man said: "Your language is that of a well-bred man accustomed to eat with kings. Eat then, my friend, with good appetite and easy digestion." "Do you know," answered my brother, "I have really eaten enough of the meat courses." When he heard this the old man clapped his hands, calling: "Remove the cloth and bring on dessert. Let us have all the pastries, the conserves, and the choicest fruits!" The little slaves ran in and bustled about as before, making quick gestures with their hands and lifting crook'd arms above their heads, as if they were indeed changing one cloth for another. At last, on a sign from the old man, they retired. "Now, dear guest," said my brother's host, "at last the time has come to give ourselves up to sweetness. Let us begin with the pastries: what say you to these almond pastes with sugar and pomegranate? Taste one or two to try. Is it not a royal confection? The syrup is just thick enough, the top-sprinkling of cinnamon done with a fairy lightness. One could eat fifty on end; but we must keep room for that sublime *kenafa* on the carved copper plate. There you have my pastrycook at his best: see into what suggestive shapes he has rolled the beards of the vermicelli. Be quick, be quick, and rejoice your senses before all the juice drips out and the so delicate paste itself crumble away. Ah, here is something worth looking at: a *mahallabieh* of rose-water, powdered with snow of almonds. And here are little porcelain bowls of whipped creams, sharpened with orange-water and spices. Eat, my friend, eat, and stay not your hand." With that the old man set an example by lifting his hand greedily to his mouth and swallowing, as if the farce were life itself. Shakalik did the same, but in his case there was real moisture upon the lips.

"Now for the conserves and fruit!" said the old man presently. "In the matter of conserves, dear guest, there is an embarrassment of choice; there, before you, are dry conserves and yonder are those with rich juices. I advise you to confine yourself to the dry, which I prefer myself; although the others are dear enough to my heart. See this shining, translucent, dry conserve of apricots, cut in long thin slices, melting, caressing, friendly; this preserve of crystallised citrons, perfumed with amber. Or these other flushed cakes of rose petals and orange flowers. And this, oh, this! it will be the death of me one of these days. Leave the others for a moment and bathe your soul a little in this moist jam of dates stuffed with almonds and cloves. It comes to me from Cairo: they cannot make it in Baghdad. One of my Egyptian friends sends me a hundred pots of it every year. But do not eat too much of it; although the eagerness of your appetite does me honour. I wish you to pay particular attention to this dry conserve of sugared carrots, diversified with nuts and scented with virgin musk." Said Shakalik: "This passes all my dreams; my palate kneels before its excellence. And yet, dare I say that I find that there is a shade too much musk . . . ?" "No, no," answered the old man, "I cannot agree with you: musk and amber are the mainstays of my soul. My cooks and confectioners have orders to put plenty of each in all they make for me."

"But," he continued, "we must not forget the fruit; I hope you have a little space left for the fruit. Here are limes, bananas, figs, fresh dates, apples, quinces and grapes. There are fresh almonds, hazel nuts, fresh walnuts, and many more. Eat, my guest, for Allah is good!"

But my brother, who by this time could hardly move his jaws from the exercise of chewing on nothing and whose stomach was in a state of excitation, excused himself, saying: "My lord, I must confess that I am full and that my throat even will not take another mouthful." "It is extraordinary that you are so easily satisfied," said the old man. "Come, let us drink; we have not had a single glass so far."

With that he clapped his hands and young boys ran in, with carefully bared arms and lifted robes, who gestured as if they were clearing away and setting two cups on the cloth, with flasks, wine jars, and heavy pots of precious metals. Then the old man pretended to pour wine in the cups and to hand one of them to my brother, who carried the shadow to his lips and drank, saying: "Allah, Lord Allah, what a wine!" and rubbing his stomach with pleasure. After this the old man went through the movements of lifting a heavy jar of old wine and pouring slowly and delicately for my brother. They acted in this way until Shakalik pretended to be overcome by the fumes of all these drinks and began to nod his head and speak in a more sprightly fashion. All the time he was thinking to himself that the moment had come for paying out the old man in his own coin.

So my brother jumped up suddenly as if he were quite drunk, lifted his arm so high that the pit was seen, and brought his hand down so violently on the old man's neck that the whole hall echoed with the slap. Raising his arm again, he struck more violently than before. At this the old man grew very angry and cried: "What are you doing, O vilest of earth's creatures?" To which my brother made answer: "Master and crown of my head, I am your obedient slave, whom you have weighed to the dust with gifts, whom you have received in your house, whom you have nourished at your cloth with the choicest meats such as kings have never tasted, whose soul you have sweetened with your conserves, your composts and your suavest pastries, and whose burning thirst you have quenched with old and precious wines. What would you, my lord? He has taken so much of the wines of your hospitality that he is drunk and has raised his hand against his saviour. Pity your slave then, since your soul is higher than his soul, and forgive the madness wrought in him by wine!"

At these excuses the old man burst out laughing, and, when he could speak, cried out to Shakalik: "Long have I searched the world, and among the most reputed wits and jokers, for a man as humorous and patient as you. None has so fooled with me in my own bent, none has so entered into the spirit of my humour and my taste, to bear so long a joke so well. I freely pardon you the round turn you gave to my jest and ask you to sit down with me this minute to eat in very truth all the meats and sweets and fruits about which we have jested. And I shall see to it that we are not parted as long as I live."

So saying the old man ordered his slaves to serve the whole meal and spare nothing.

This was done; and after both had eaten of all the meats and indulged themselves with the pastries, conserves, and fruits, his host invited my brother to pass with him into a chamber specially reserved for the drinking of wine. On going in, they were received with lute-playing and singing by white slaves as fair as a flock of summer moons. They sang while my brother and the old man drank the oldest wines; and charmed them with the most pleasing melodies. Then certain of them danced like birds with quick and perfumed wings. The day ended with kisses and games more precious than those which come to a man in dreams.

From that time the old man bound my brother to himself with every tie of kindness, making him an intimate and inseparable friend, loving him with all his heart, and daily giving him novel and expensive presents. They ate and drank and lived in sweet luxury for twenty years.

But what Destiny has written comes surely to pass. The old man died, and the wali seized all his goods for himself, as there were no heirs and my brother was not a relation by blood. Shakalik was obliged to flee from the wicked persecution of the wali and leave our city of Baghdad behind him.

He set out upon a journey across the desert to Mecca, that he might return holy. But one day the troop of pilgrims to which he had attached himself was attacked by a band of roving Arabs, cut-throats of the road, evil Mussulmans, not having before their eyes the law of our Prophet (on whom be the prayer and peace of Allah). All were robbed and taken as slaves, my brother falling to the lot of the most bloodthirsty of all the Bedouins, who took him to his far-away tribe and kept him there as a menial. He beat and tortured him every day, saying: "You seem to have been a very rich man in your own country. Send for a ransom or I will torture you more and more, and in the end kill you by my own hand." Then would my brother weep and say: "As Allah lives, O chief of the Arabs, I have nothing. I have never known the road which leads to fortune."

Now this Bedouin had among his tents a marvel of women, a wife with black brows and eyes like night, hotly insatiable in the matter of caresses. Each time that her husband was away from his tent she would come and be gracious to my brother, tempting him with her charms, that fine flower of the Arabian desert. But unlike the rest of us, my brother, Shakalik was by no means a famous man with the ladies, so he always evaded the Bedouin woman for fear that his sin should be seen by Almighty Allah. Nevertheless a day came when the girl, whose importuning knew no bounds, succeeded in overcoming my brother's reserve. Shakalik approached her and made ready for that which he deemed sinful. Just at this exact minute, when they were in the most frankly compromising situation, the terrible Arab rushed in and saw all. With a furious movement he drew a large scimitar from his belt, such a blade as might have halved a camel's jugular with one stroke, and, seizing my brother, cut off his adulterous lips and stuffed them in his mouth. Then crying: "Foul traitor, you have soiled my wife!" he grasped my brother and made him a eunuch. Lastly he dragged Shakalik out and, throwing his body over the back of a camel, hurried with him to the top of a mountain and threw him down there to die.

This mountain lay on the road to Mecca, so that certain pilgrims from Baghdad found my brother and, recognising him as Shakalik, the broken pot, who had so often pleased them with his jests, gave him food and drink and hurried to tell me what had happened.

I ran to find him, O Commander of the Faithful, and bore him back on my shoulders to Baghdad. I healed his wounds and made him a life-allowance at my table. This I did not only because of the love I bear the son of my father but also because I well know that Allah returns in blessings a hundred fold that which is bestowed in charity.

Such as I am, I stand before you, O Commander of the Faithful, having been at some pains to tell you the tales of my six brothers in the fewest possible words. I could have elaborated them, but I preferred, instead of taking advantage of your patience, to prove that I am a taciturn man, not only the brother of my brothers, but in some sort their father. In fine to show you that they are nothing campared with myself, Al-Samit, the Silent Man.

Hearing my last tale (went on the barber to the guests) the khalifat Montaser Billah burst out laughing and said to me: "It is very true, O Samit, that you are a man of few words, incapable of indiscretion, curiosity, or ill-breeding; yet I have particular reasons for wishing you to leave Baghdad this very hour and take yourself elsewhere. Hasten to do so!" So, you see, the khalifat exiled me unjustly and for no possible fault of mine.

From that time, my masters, I travelled through all lands and in the varying heat and cold of the world, until I heard that Montaser Billah was dead and that the khalifat Al-Mostasem had succeeded him. Then I returned to Baghdad and found that all my brothers were dead. It was after my return that the young man, who has so rudely left us, sent for me to shave his head. I assure you, gentlemen, that, notwithstanding all that he has told you, I was of the very greatest service to him. If it had not been for me he would surely have died by the hand of his mistress's father, the kadi. All that he has said of me is lies; all that he has spoken of my curiosity, my indiscretion, my slack tongue, my gross character, my lack of all tact and taste, is absolutely false. This, gentlemen, I assure you most solemnly.

Such, O auspicious King, continued Shahrazade, is the sevenfold tale which the Chinese tailor told his sovereign. When the stories were done he proceeded thus:—

When the barber, Al-Samit, had finished his tale, the rest of us guests needed no further proof that he was the most astonishingly garrulous and indiscreet of all barbers upon earth. From what we had heard we had no doubt at all that the lame young man of Baghdad had been the victim of insupportable importunity; so, although all the barber's tales had amused us very much, we decided to punish him. After a short deliberation we seized hold of him, in spite of his expostulation, and shut him in a dark room filled with rats. The rest of us continued our feast, eating, drinking, and making merry until the time of evening prayer. Then we separated and I returned home to give my wife something to eat.

But when I reached my house, my wife angrily turned her back on me, saying: "Is it thus that you leave me all day moping and miserable at home, while you enjoy yourself? If you do not take me out at once and give me a pleasant jaunt for the rest of the evening, I shall go to the kadi and demand a divorce."

I have always hated ill-temper and domestic brawls; so, tired as I was, I went out with my wife and we wandered among the streets and gardens until sunset. As we were returning home, we met your little hunchback quite by chance, O clement King. He was very drunk and very gay, saying deliciously clever things to every one he met, and bawling these lines continually:—

Between this purple cup and wine of mine
I cannot make my drunken senses up;
Because the cup resembles so the wine,
And the mauve wine resembles so the cup.

Every now and then he would break off to play some joke upon the passers-by or to dance to the accompaniment of his little drum. My wife and I, thinking that he would be an agreeable table companion, asked him to share our evening meal. We all ate together, because my wife, who would never have sat down in the presence of a strange man, did not consider your hunchback to be wholly such.

What happened afterwards you know; as a jest my wife thrust a great handful of fish into the hunchback's mouth and choked him. We took the body and left it in the house of the Jewish doctor, he threw it into the house of the steward, and the steward left it in the way of the Christian broker.

Such, O generous King, is the whole tale of the barber and his brothers, which I deem to be, not only more extraordinary than the other tales which you heard today, but even surpassing in marvel and pleasantry the story of the hunchback.

When the tailor had finished speaking, the king of China said: "I must admit, O tailor, that your story has points of great interest and is even perhaps more suggestive than the adventure which befell my unfortunate hunchback. But where is this prodigious barber of whom you speak? I must see and hear him before I make up my mind as to the fate of the four of you. After that we must bury our hunchback, for he has been dead since yesterday. We will build a fair tomb above him, because he greatly amused us in his life, and, even in death, caused me to hear the story of the lame young man and of the barber's six brothers and the three other tales.

So saying, the king ordered his chamberlains to go with the tailor and bring back the barber. An hour later, they returned having set the barber free and bringing him with them.

The king looked at the barber and saw that he was an old man, ninety years of age, with a very dark face and a very white beard, with white brows, ears pierced and hanging, an astonishingly long nose, and a proud conceited cast of countenance. Having well looked him over, the king burst into a roar of laughter and said: "O silent man, I hear that you can tell excellent tales. Come, give me a sample of your quality." "O King of time," answered the barber, "you have not been misinformed, but before all else I would myself know why this Christian, this Mussulman, this Jew, and this dead hunchback are combined here in so strange a juxtaposition?" The King of China laughed heartily at this, saying: "Why are you so interested in these people who are strangers to you?" "I only asked," replied the barber, "in order to prove to my king that I am discreet, incurious in all save my own concerns, and innocent of those calumnies which some people have put about to the effect that I am given to tattling. I am worthy of the name 'Silent Man,' which has been given to me. A poet has said:

If any man has earned a name,
I deem him worthy of the same."

"I like this barber," said the king, "I will tell him the story of the hunchback, then the Christian's tale, the Jew's, the steward's, and the tailor's." And straightway he did so without omitting a single detail; but it would be useless for me to repeat them here.

When the barber had heard all the stories and learnt the cause of the hunchback's death, he shook his head gravely, saying: "By Allah, this is a most extraordinary thing! Lift the veil from the hunchback's body, some of you, that I may see him." As soon as the corpse was uncovered, the barber went up to it and, sitting down, took the head upon his knees. After he had attentively examined the face for a long time, he went off into shouts of laughter, toppling over on his backside in his amusement. "Truly there is a cause for every death," he spluttered at length, "but the cause of this death is, I dare swear, unique. Yes, the cause of this death should be written in the royal registers with liquid gold as an instruction to posterity."

Amazed by the barber's words, the king insisted that he should explain them. Then said the Silent Man: "I swear by your sacred head, O king, that there is life in your hunchback yet. I will show you." So saying, he took from his belt an unguent in a phial with which he annointed the hunchback's neck, covering it afterwards with linen until the flesh sweated. Then he introduced a pair of iron forceps into his patient's throat and drew out the lump of fish with its bone. Immediately the hunchback sneezed violently, opened his eyes, felt his face with his hand, and jumped to his feet, crying: "There is no God save Allah, Muhamad is His prophet, on whom be the Master's prayer and peace!"

All who stood round were amazed at this sight and filled with great admiration for the barber. When they had recovered a little from their astonishment, the king and all who were with him could not help laughing at the jester's expression. "By Allah," said the king, "this is a prodigy, if you will! I have never seen anything like it in my life! Have any of you good Mussulmans ever seen a dead man brought to life like this? Only to think, if Allah had not sent us this barber, this venerable Al-Samit, our hunchback would have been buried today! We owe his life to the knowledge and excellence of this worthy old man." "It is a prodigy of prodigies," said all the rest, "it is miracle of miracles!"

Joyfully the king of China ordered all the tales centering round the hunchback and all those concerned with the barber to be written out fairly in letters of gold and preserved in the royal library. While this was being duly done, he gave magnificent robes of honour to each of the accused, the Jewish doctor, the Christian broker, the steward, and the tailor, and created them all positions about his palace. Also, he reconciled them with the hunchback. To his restored jester he gave rich presents, appointing him to various high offices, and naming him his own perpetual cupmate. For the barber he could not do enough; he clothed him in a sumptuous robe, and had made for him a golden astrolabe, and golden scissors, and razors encrusted with pearls and diamonds. Also he appointed him royal barber and called him friend.

All with whom these tales have been concerned lived thereafter in pleasure and properity, until their joys were cut short by the Thief of time, the Breaker of friendships.

"But," said Shahrazade to King Shahryar, ruler of the Isles of Hind and China, "do not believe this story is in any way more astonishing than the tale of the beautiful Sweet-Friend." "What Sweet-Friend is that?" cried King Shahryar.

Then Shahrazade said:

THE TALE OF SWEET-FRIEND AND ALI-NUR

It is related, O auspicious King, that there was once, on the throne of Bassora, a sultan, tributary to the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid, whose name was Muhamad bin Sulayman al-Zayni. He loved the poor and lowly, raised the fallen, and parted with his gold to all believers in the Prophet, on whom be the prayer and peace of Allah. He was in every way worthy of that ode which a poet wrote in his honour. It begins:

His ink was blood and his good lance at rest
A ready pen
For fair caligraphy;
It wrote red songs in praise of victory
Upon the white papyrus of the breast
Of other men.

This king had two wazirs; the one Al-Muin, son of Sawi, and the other Al-Fazl, son of Kahkan. Now you must know that Fadleddin, son of Kahkan, was the most generous man of all his time; admirable in virtue and manner, urbane in character, loved by all and esteemed by all for his wisdom and knowledge. Men came to him in their difficulties, and in all the kingdoms there was no one who did not pray long life and prosperity for him, knowing him to be above evil and beyond injustice. The second wazir, the son of Sawi, was the exact opposite of this good man in every way. He hated men and abominated goodness; his daily practice was evil. A certain poet has said of him:

I rose and walked away when he was nigh,
I lifted up my robe as he went by;
I leapt upon my horse and rode all day
To find some place beneath a cleaner sky.

The difference between these two wazirs has been well summed up by another poet, who said:

Scan Noble's lineage and you will find
Age after age a Noble of that kind:
Vile's line is just as long, for, all the while,
Vile's father's father's father's name was Vile.

It is to be remembered that men hated the wazir Al-Muin just as deeply as they loved the wazir Fadleddin; also that Al-Muin, while pretending a great friendship for Fadleddin, lost no opportunity of prejudicing him in the eyes of the king.

One day Muhamad bin Sulayman had heard that there was newly arrived in Bassora a fresh batch of young slaves from all countries; so, sitting on his throne among his emirs and the chief nobles of his court, he said to his wazir Fadleddin: "I wish you to find me a young slave without equal in the whole world. She must have perfect beauty, superior attributes, and an admirably sweet character."

Wishing to cross the king because of this sign of confidence shown to his rival, the wazir Sawi, cried: "But even supposing such a woman could be found, she would cost ten thousand golden dinars." The king, made all the more eager by this obstacle, immediately caused his treasurer to deliver ten thousand golden pieces at the palace of Fadleddin and ordered the favoured wazir to execute his commission at once.

Fadleddin lost no time in going to the slave market, but he could find no woman fulfilling the conditions of the king. He called together all the brokers concerned in the selling of black and white slaves and bade them search for what he required, commanding that any woman offered for over a thousand dinars should be shown to him before a sale was made. After this not a day passed without two or three brokers bringing some chosen slave to the wazir; so that by the end of a month more than a thousand girls had passed before his eyes: a troop able to bring back fire to the limbs of a thousand ancients without his having been able to decide on one.

One morning as Fadleddin had mounted his horse and was about to ride to the palace to beg for an extension of time, a certain broker of his acquaintance ran up and, holding his stirrup, honourably greeted him with these lines:

O grand wazir,
Whose hand holds up the glory of this reign,
Making the old times come again,
O grand wazir,
Whose sword was never turned aside,
Whose breath brings back the life when life has died,
O grand wazir,
Whose every action God approves,
Whose every thought His Prophet loves,
O grand wazir!

Concluding these verses, the broker said: "Noble Fadleddin, great son of Kahkan, I come to announce that such a slave as you have honoured me by requiring has been found and is ready for you." "Bring her quickly to my palace that I may see her," said the wazir, dismounting from his horse and returning to his apartments. An hour later the broker returned, holding a young girl by the hand. She was tall and slim, with marvellous out-pointing breasts, brown lids over night-coloured eyes, smooth full cheeks, a laughing chin, light-shaded with a dimple, hips in firm curves, a bee's waist, and a heavy swelling croup. She stood before him dressed in rare stuffs. Her mouth was a flower, the wet of it sweeter than sherbert; her lips were redder than flowering nutmeg; and all her body wavered like the tender shoot of a willow. Her voice had more music than the song of a light wind, sweeter than the light wind which has passed over gardens of flowers. A poet has sung this of her:

Her body is silk like water,
With the curves of water,
Pure and restful as water.

To be with her in the night!
Her hair, the wings of night;
And her hands the pale stars of night.

God said: Let there be eyes,
And lo! the dew of her eyes,
The dark wine of her eyes.

This girl, ripe and young like a flower, was called Anis al-Jalis, Sweet-Friend.

When the wazir saw her he marvelled, and asked the broker her price. "Her owner asked me ten thousand dinars," answered the other, "and I agreed to that price because I thought it not excessive. He claims that he will lose on the transaction for various reasons which I would prefer you to hear from his own lips." "Bring him to me at once," said the wazir.

The broker fetched the owner of the slave with all speed and the wazir saw that he was an old and very feeble Persian. Such was the poet when he wrote:

Time has undone
  My body's quickness
    Ruthlessly:
Once I was straight and walked towards the sun,
  But now I keep the house with my friend, Sickness,
    And my last mistress, Immobility.

The old man wished the wazir peace and the other said: "It is agreed, then, that you sell me this slave for ten thousand golden dinars? She is not for me, but for the king.'' ''As she is for the king,'' answered the old man, ''I would willingly offer her for nothing; but, as you insist, most generous of wazirs, I will accept ten thousand dinars. At the same time, I must tell you, that sum would hardly pay for the white chicken-meat she has eaten: much less for her clothes and her education. She has had numberless masters: she has learnt the most excellent caligraphy, together with both Arabic and Persian grammar and syntax; she knows the commentaries of the Book, moral law, jurisprudence, philosophy and ethics, geometry, medicine, cadastral survey, and the like; but her chief excellence is in poetry, music of all kinds, singing and dancing. She has read all the books of the poets and the historians; but her knowledge is only the sweetening to a noble character and great good humour. That is why I have named her Sweet-Friend.''

''I do not doubt that you are right,'' said the wazir, ''but I can only pay you ten thousand dinars. I pray you, therefore, count the sum on the spot.'' Fadleddin paid the old Persian his money, but, before he left, the slave merchant said: ''If I may give you a word of advice, I would suggest that you do not take Sweet-Friend at once to our sovereign Muhamad bin Sulayman, for only today she has finished a long journey and is a little worn by the change of climate and of water. It would be better both for you and her if you were to keep her ten days in your own palace where, resting and bathing and changing her garments, she can recover the fine flower of her beauty. Then you can present her to the sultan and he will honour you all the more for your precautions.'' The old man's advice seemed good to Fadleddin, so he received Sweet-Friend in his own home and prepared a private room where she might rest.

Now the wazir Fadleddin, son of Kahkan, had a son so handsome that people beholding him thought that the moon was rising. His skin was marvellously white, but rose blushed below the silky down of his cheeks and on one of them lay a beauty spot like a sprinkle of ambergris. He was like the boy in the song:

Roses sweeter than red dates and grapes,
But my hand falters
In putting forth to touch his cheek
And my eyes close sleepily
After their feasting.

If his heart were as tender
As the peeled wand of his body,
He would not so coldly have sinned against me.

You cannot accuse me, for I am mad,
Nor my darling, for he is more than royal.
Arrest my heart,
But you will find no punishment,
No room for chains.

This young man, whose name was Ali-Nur, knew nothing of the purchase of Sweet-Friend. But the wazir his father had most strictly recommended this precept to the girl: "Know, dear child, that I have bought you for our master, Muhamad bin Sulayman; therefore guard yourself well and avoid any occasion on which you, and therefore I, might be compromised. I have a son who is a very handsome fellow but somewhat of a rascal; there is not a girl in all the quarter who has not freely given herself to him, whose flower he has not plucked. Avoid any meeting with him, let him not hear your voice or see your face: otherwise you will be lost." "I hear and I obey," answered Sweet-Friend, and the wazir left her to go about his business.

Allah had written that things should turn out very differently from the intentions of the good wazir. A few days later, Sweet-Friend went to the bath in the wazir's palace and all the little slaves set themselves to give her such a bath as they had never achieved in their lives before. After washing her hair and all her limbs, they rubbed and kneaded her, depilated her carefully with paste of caramel, sprinkled her hair with a sweet wash prepared from musk, tinted her finger-nails and her toe-nails with henna, burnt male incense and ambergris at her feet, and rubbed light perfumes into all her skin. Then they threw a large towel, scented with orange-flowers and roses, over her body, and, wrapping all her hair in a warm cloth, led her to her own apartment where the wazir's wife waited to wish her the customary wishes of the bath. Sweet-Friend advanced on seeing Ali-Nur's mother and kissed her hand; the wazir's wife embraced her on both cheeks, saying: "Health and delight to you from this bath, Sweet-Friend! How fair and bright and scented you are, my child. You light our house and we have no need of torches." Sweet-Friend, moved by this kind speech, lifted her hand to her heart, her lips, and her brow, and answered with an inclination of the head: "Mistress and mother, I thank you heartily. May Allah give you all joy on earth and in Paradise! My bath was delicious and I only wish you could have shared it with me." Ali-Nur's mother had sherberts and pastries brought for Sweet-Friend and wished her health and a good digestion.

The old lady herself wished to take a bath, but, before leaving for this purpose, she commanded two of the little slaves to guard the door of Sweet-Friend's apartment, and to allow no one in on any pretext whatever, since, as she said, Sweet-Friend was quite naked and might catch cold. The little ones answered: "We hear and we obey!" and the wazir's wife went with all her women to the bath, after kissing Sweet-Friend a last time and being wished by her a pleasant visit to the hammam.

Hardly had she left when young Ali-Nur entered the house and sought his mother, that he might kiss her hand as was his daily custom. He hunted through the rooms until he came at last to the one reserved for Sweet-Friend. Astonished to find the door guarded by the two little slaves, who smiled at him because they secretly loved him, he asked if his mother was within. They answered, trying to push him back with their little hands: "Oh no, oh no, our mistress is not here, she is not here! She is at the hammam, at the hammam. She is at the hammam, Ali-Nur." "Then what are you doing here, my lambs? Come away from the door that I may go in and rest," said Ali-Nur. But the little ones answered: "You cannot come in, Ali-Nur, you cannot come in! Our young mistress, Sweet-Friend, is inside." "What Sweet-Friend is that?" asked Ali-Nur. They answered: "It is the lovely Sweet-Friend whom your father, our master, the wazir Fadleddin, bought with ten thousand dinars for the sultan al-Zayni. She has just come from the bath and is quite naked. She only has on a big towel. You cannot come in, you cannot come in, Ali-Nur: she will take cold and our mistress will beat us. You cannot come in, Ali-Nur!"

All this time, Sweet-Friend, who heard what was being said outside her room, was thinking: "This must be young Ali-Nur whose exploits his father told me. Can this really be that handsome youth who has not left one girl a virgin or one woman unloved in all the quarter? By my life, I would like to see him!" Unable to contain herself, she rose to her feet all scented from the bath, her happy body bare to the joy of life, and, slightly opening the door, looked out. She saw Ali-Nur as if the stars were just beyond her door; from that one look she reaped a thousand joys and sorrows. And Ali-Nur also took one glance through that little space, so that the sight remained with him for ever.

Ali-Nur, carried away by passion, shouted at and pushed the two little slaves so violently that they fled weeping away. They stopped, however, in the adjoining room, and, looking from far off through the door which the young man had forgotten to shut, saw all that passed between him and Sweet-Friend.

Ali-Nur entered and found Sweet-Friend trembling and submissive upon the diwan, stretched out with wide and startled eyes; so he bowed to her with his hand on his heart, saying tenderly: "Sweet-Friend, was it you whom my father bought for ten thousand dinars of gold? Did they then weigh you in the other scale? Sweet-Friend, you are more beautiful than molten gold, your hair falls fuller than the mane of a desert lion, your loveliness is sweeter and cooler than the foam of streams." "Ali-Nur," she answered, "to my frightened eyes you are more terrible than the desert lion, to my leaping heart you are stronger than a leopard, to my pale lips you are more deadly than a tempered sword. Ali-Nur, you are more than any Sultan, you are my king. I am yours."

Ali-Nur threw himself on the diwan by Sweet-Friend's side, drunken for very joy; and they gripped each other. The little slaves were astonished, for what they saw was strange to them and they did not understand it. They were fascinated, yet terrified; they wished to run to their mistress; yet could not seem to move from the spot. They stood, thus, their eyes like large saucers, their limbs trembling with fear. Then the terror-stricken little slaves fled crying to the hammam, from which Ali-Nur's mother was just emerging all wet from her bath. "Why do you weep and run, my little ones?" she asked. "O mistress, O mistress!" they stammered. "What harm has fallen, little wretches?" she asked sharply. Then, crying all the more, they said: "O mistress, our young master Ali-Nur beat us and chased us away. Then he went into Sweet-Friend, our mistress, and they embraced each other. What happened afterwards we do not know for we did not understand. We are very frightened. . . ." The wife of the wazir waited to hear no more. Although the wife of the wazir was an old woman and wore at the time high wooden bath-clogs, she ran as hard as she could when she heard what had happened, and came to Sweet-Friend's room with all her women just as young Ali-Nur had quietly slipped away through the long passage which led by the garden. He crawled on hands and knees so that he was hid from sight. Ali-Nur knew hidden escapes from every house in the quarter.

The wazir's wife, all yellow in the face, went up to Sweet-Friend and asked her what had happened. The girl answered in terms which that rascal Ali-Nur had prepared for her. "Mistress, as I was resting on the diwan after my bath, a young man came in whom I had never seen before. He was very handsome, my mistress, and about the eyes and lashes he much resembled you. He said: 'You are that Sweet-Friend whom my father bought for me with ten thousand dinars.' 'I am Sweet-Friend,' I answered, 'and was indeed bought with ten thousand dinars; but it was for our king, Muhamad bin Sulayman.' 'Not at all, Sweet-Friend,' he answered laughing, 'I know my father meant you for the king at first; but now he has changed his mind and given you to me as a present.' Mistress, I am but a slave whose lot is to obey; and I think I did well. I would rather be Ali-Nur's slave than the legal queen of all Baghdad." "Alas, alas, my child, what a misfortune!" cried the wazir's wife. "It is Ali-Nur, my scapegrace son, who has betrayed you. Tell me what he did." "I gave myself to him," said Sweet-Friend, "he took me and hugged me close." "But did he take you altogether?" asked the old woman. "Indeed he did, I am his slave, dear mother," answered Sweet-Friend. Then Ali-Nur's mother crying out: "Woe, woe, the rascal has destroyed you utterly!" began to weep and beat her face with her hands. Her women imitated her, for they all now went in deadly fear of the wazir, who, though ordinarily a mild and generous man, would never tolerate an escapade which called his own and the king's honour in question. He was quite capable, in his anger, of killing Ali-Nur with his own hand. Therefore his wife and all her women wept as if the youth were dead already; and lo, as they did so, the wazir Fadleddin entered the room and asked them the cause of their sorrow.

His wife wiped her eyes and blew her nose, saying: "Father of my son, first swear by the Prophet (on whom be the prayer and peace of Allah) that you will deal with this thing exactly as I tell you; otherwise I would rather die than speak." The wazir swore, and then his wife told him of Ali-Nur's pretended trick and of the irrevocable harm which had come to Sweet-Friend's virginity.

His father and mother had put up with a multitude of Ali-Nur's scrapes; but at this last one Fadleddin was stricken down. He tore his clothes, hit himself in the face, bit his hands, pulled out his beard, and threw his turban far from him. Wishing to console him, his wife said: "Do not distress yourself. I will pay you back the ten thousand dinars out of my own money, for I have lately sold some jewels." "What are you saying, woman?" cried Fadleddin. "Do you think that I weep for the money? It is for the loss of my honour that I weep and for the death which will surely come upon me." "But, my dear, nothing is lost," said his wife, "the king does not know of the existence of Sweet-Friend, therefore the loss of her virginity can mean nothing to him. I will give you ten thousand dinars and you can buy another beautiful slave for the king. Then we can keep Sweet-Friend for Ali-Nur, who already loves her and recognises the treasure we have found in her." "But, mother of my son," objected the wazir, "have you forgotten that there is an enemy always lying in wait for us, Sawi, the second wazir, who will one day hear of this tale? And, when he does, he will go to the sultan and say . . ."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirty-third Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that the wazir

Fadleddin told his wife that their enemy, the wazir Sawi, would go to the sultan and say: "O king, you gave that wazir, whom you always claimed to be so faithful to you, ten thousand dinars with which to buy you a slave. He bought you one without her equal in the whole world and, finding her beauty beyond parallel, said to that corrupt youth, his son: 'Take her, my boy; you are more worthy of her than the old king who has a hundred concubines and is much too ancient for love making.' Then that Ali-Nur, than whom there is no greater young rake in all the kingdom, laid hold of the slave and made her his own. He still keeps her, amidst the women of his father's house, the good-for-nothing young libertine.

"When my enemy Sawi says this," continued Fadleddin, "the sultan who believes in me, will tell him that he lies. Then Sawi will ask leave to come down upon my house with a troop and bring Sweet-Friend to the king. The sultan will give leave and, when he questions Sweet-Friend, she will not be able to deny the fact. Sawi will say in triumph: 'Master, you see that I am a good counsellor; and yet that traitor, Fadleddin, is ever preferred before me.' The heart of the sultan will be changed and I shall be punished and made a laughing-stock before all who love and reverence me. Also I will lose my life."

"My dear," answered his wife, "tell no one what has happened and no one will know. Trust in Allah, for only what He wishes will come to pass." The wazir became calmer at his wife's words and began to feel more confident about the future. He knew what Allah willed would come to pass but he feared that it might not include a revenge against Ali-Nur. But his anger towards Ali-Nur still remained.

Ali-Nur himself, when he had slipped from Sweet-Friend's room on hearing the cries of the little slaves, wandered about all day and, returning only late at night, hid himself from his father's anger with his mother in the women's apartments. She pardoned him with a kiss and hid him carefully, helped by her women who were all a little jealous that Sweet-Friend should have so mighty a stag within her arms. With their assistance Ali-Nur kept from his father's sight for a whole month, slipping in to his mother's room late at night, where he found Sweet-Friend always waiting for him.

One day Ali-Nur's mother, seeing her husband less sad than usual, said to him: "How long is your anger going to last against our son? We have lost a slave; do we want to lose our boy also? If this goes on, he will leave us altogether and we shall bitterly mourn the only child of our bodies." "But what is to be done?" said the wazir. "Stay with me tonight," answered his wife, "and when Ali-Nur comes in, I will make peace between you. At first you can pretend to chastise him, even to kill him; then, softening by degrees, you can marry him to Sweet-Friend. She is in every way admirable and they love each other. I myself, as I have said, will give you the money which you have paid for her."

The wazir, falling in with his wife's plan, leapt upon Ali-Nur that night as soon as he came to his mother's apartment, and, throwing him on his back, brandished a knife above him. "What would you do?" cried the mother, throwing herself between them. "I will kill him!" cried the wazir. "But he repents!" wept his wife; and Ali-Nur said: "Father, would you kill your son?" "Unhappy boy," answered the wazir, weeping, "how could you bring yourself so to jeopardise my honour and my life?" "Listen, father," said Ali-Nur, "to these words of the poet:

Ah, kill me not;
The more my sins,
The greater is your pardoning,
In my heart's plot
The spider spins,
Weeds grow, the ground is hardening;
A barren lot,
Until begins
My clement father's gardening."

The wazir, hearing these lines, allowed his son to rise to his knees; compassion entered his heart and he pardoned him. Ali-Nur rose and, kissing his father's hands, stood submissively before him. "My son," said Fadleddin, "why did you not tell me that you truly loved Sweet-Friend and that it was not a passing fancy. If I had known that you were ready to deal faithfully by her, I would have given her to you." "I am ready to deal very faithfully by her," answered Ali-Nur. "Then, my dear child," said the wazir, "I have only one recommendation to make to you, which I charge you never to forget, if you would not forfeit my blessing: Promise me that you will never take other wife than Sweet-Friend, that you will never ill-treat her, and never sell her." "All this I swear," said Ali-Nur solemnly, "on the life of our Prophet and upon the Sacred Book."

All the house was filled with joy at this agreement and Ali-Nur became freely possessed of Sweet-Friend. He lived with her in perfect accord for a whole year and, during that time, Allah took from the king all memory of having given ten thousand dinars to Fadleddin for the purchase of a slave. The wicked wazir, Sawi, soon came to hear of the matter, but he dared say nothing to the king because of the high opinion in which his rival was held, both by the sultan and all the people of Bassora.

It happened that one day the wazir Fadleddin, hasting away from the hammam before his sweat was dry, took cold from a change in the weather and had to keep his bed. He speedily grew worse, being unable to sleep night or day, and at last a consumption gripped him so that he became but a shadow of his former self. He dared no longer put off the last duties of his life; so he sent for his son and, when he came weeping, said to him: "My child, joy has an end, good has a limit; each bill falls due, each cup has bitter dregs. Today I drink the sharp cup of eternity." Then he murmured these lines:

Once he will miss, twice he will miss,
He only chooses one of many hours;
For him nor deep nor hill there is,
But all's one level plain he hunts for flowers.

"Now, my son," he went on, "I can but tell you to put your trust in Allah, to keep your eyes fixed on the end of man, and to take care of Sweet-Friend." "Father, oh father, you are leaving us," cried Ali-Nur, "and who will be left like you in all the earth? None knows your name save to bless it, the preachers in the mosque on Friday speak of you in their discourses and pray for you." "My child, I hope that Allah will receive me and will not cast me out," said Fadleddin. Then he pronounced the two acts of faith in a firm voice: "I witness that there is no God but Allah! I witness that Muhamad is His Prophet!" and, rendering his last sigh, became for ever written among the blessed.

The palace was filled with grief, news was borne to the king, and all the city of Bassora learnt of the death of the wazir Fadleddin, son of Kahkan; so that the people, and even the little children in the schools, wept for him. Ali-Nur spared neither trouble nor expense to make the funeral worthy of his father's memory. In the cortège walked all the emirs, wazirs, and grandees of the kingdom; the people followed after, and the wicked Sawi was obliged to be one of the eight who carried the coffin. When the house of death was left behind, the principal sheikh who was solemnising the burial said these, among many other stanzas, in honour of the dead:

I said to the obsequious ministers of death:
You waste your breath
In wailing him whom many mournful angels weep
In heaven's deep.
Spread if you must the lustral water on his thighs,
From glory's eyes
Purer aspersion sprinkles. If your fingers must
Preserve his dust
With dark sweet gums; forget not the far sweeter balms
Of his rich alms.
Fear not but that the shoulders of mourners can hold well
The shallow shell
Of him whose kindly mercies every head bowed down
In all the town.

For long after his father's death Ali-Nur shut himself in with his grief and refused to see anyone; but one day, as he sat sadly thinking of his father, a knock came at the door and a young man of his own age, the son of one of his father's friends, craved admittance.

When Ali-Nur had let him in, he kissed the mourner's hand, saying: "My friend, no man dies; he lives again in his posterity. One must not grieve for ever; your father lives again in you. The master of us all, Muhamad, the Prophet of Allah, upon whom be prayer and peace, said: 'Lift up your hearts and cease to mourn.'"

Ali-Nur did not know well what to answer; but, determining to renounce his grief, he had his guest-hall filled with all that was necessary for the reception of his friends and, from that time, kept open house for old and young. More especially he cultivated the companionship of ten young men, sons of the chief merchants of Bassora, and with them passed all his time in joy and feasting. He gave presents to every one and no new person was introduced to him without having a feast given in his honour. So prodigally did he live, in spite of the sage warnings of Sweet-Friend, that one day his steward came to him, saying: "My master, do you not know that too much generosity destroys the giver; too many presents waste the house; and he who gives without account deals penury to himself? The poet was right when he said:

My silver hoard
Is all my sword;
Then shall I give my enemy my sword?
My gold's a spear
And those I fear
Would gladly plunge it in my back, I fear.

I will keep my golden spear,
I will keep my silver sword;
So shall my foes be friends and hear
My lightest whispered word,

And run to me and sweetly swear
I am their lord,
Fawning below my golden spear,
Kissing my silver sword."

Ali-Nur looked curiously at his steward when he said these lines, and answered: "Your words cannot touch me. I have but one thing to say to you; I say it once and for all: as long as you find I have enough to buy me breakfast, take no thought for my dinner. I also know the poets. One of them said:

If I were cleared of all my minted joys,
My golden jolliboys,
  I would not take it ill.
I would forget my old expensive sweets,
My gaily coloured treats,
  By sitting still.

There's no excess in a poor lad
Who stays content, when things are bad,
After the sweet expense of all he had;
  And such am I, Sir.
For whatsoever thing befall
I'd rather die a prodigal,
One who had lived beyond them all,
  Than be a miser."

After this there was nothing left for the steward to do but to bow respectfully to his master and retire.

From that day Ali-Nur put no bounds to his generosity and a natural kindliness which made him give all he had to friends and strangers. A guest had but to say: "How beautiful that is!" for him to answer: "It is yours!" A friend had but to remark: "My lord, what a delightful house you have in such and such a place!'' for Ali-Nur to take pen and paper and, after he had written and sealed a deed of gift, hand it to the friend, saying: ''Now it belongs to you.'' He behaved in this way for a whole year, giving a daily feast at morning and at night to all his friends, at which the most reputed singers and dancers were always in attendance.

Sweet-Friend was not listened to in those days and was even a little neglected; but, instead of complaining, she consoled herself with her poetry and other books. One day, when Ali-Nur was with her in her own apartment, she said: ''O Nur, light of my eyes, listen to this poem:

Surely it is a pleasant thing
To fill the mouths of friends with golden gifts.
(Only beware the shifts
Of fortune's wing).

The drowsy nights are sent to steep
The over-laboured senses of the day.
(But of what use are they,
If she'll not sleep?).

As she was saying these lines, there came a knock on the door. Ali-Nur went to the door and, finding it was the steward, led him to a little room next to the guest-hall, where many of his friends were feasting at the time. When they were alone together, Ali-Nur asked the other why he had so long a face, and the steward answered: ''Master, that which I feared has come to pass; my occupation has gone, for there is nothing left for me to look after for you. Of each and everything you had, not a penny remains. Here are my accounts; the two books balance exactly." On this Ali-Nur bowed his head saying: "There is no power or might save in Allah."

Now one of his friends in the hall had heard all this and immediately told the others that Ali-Nur was penniless; also the face of their host, when he returned to them, confirmed the news.

So one of the guests rose and said to Ali-Nur: "My lord, may I have leave to retire? My wife is lying in tonight and I must not stay any longer away from her." Ali-Nur gave him leave to depart and soon a second rose, saying: "My brother celebrates the circumcision of his little boy today; I must really be present at the ceremony." Thus, one by one, all the guests made excuse and left Ali-Nur alone in the middle of his hall. Calling Sweet-Friend he said: "My dear, you do not know the misfortune that has happened to me." With that he told her of his ruin, and she said: "Dear Ali-Nur, for a long time I have feared that this would happen. You would never listen to me; one day, even, you answered my remonstrances with these lines:

If painted Fortune pass your door,
Seize her and bear her in;
She has the soul of any whore,
Do what you will you cannot humble her.
Throw all your gold about and she will stay,
Try to economise and she'll away.

Not wishing for any more answers like this, I have since kept silence."

"Sweet-Friend," said Ali-Nur, "you know that I have spent all my goods on my friends, stinting them nothing; now you will see that they will not abandon me in my misfortune." "By Allah, but I am sure they will!" answered Sweet-Friend. "We shall see," said Ali-Nur, "I will go this minute and obtain some money from each of them; so that I can set up in business and leave all this pleasuring for ever." So he went out, and soon came to the most beautiful street in Bassora, in which his ten friends lived. Knocking at the first door and, being asked, by a negress, who was there, he answered: "Tell your master that Ali-Nur is at the door, ready to kiss his hand and beg his generosity." The negress reported this to her master and, being told to say he was from home, returned to Ali-Nur with that message. "The bastard hides from me," thought the young man, "but the others will not treat me so scurvily." Yet, at the second door he tried, he received the same answer and could not help murmuring these lines:

No sooner had I come to visit these,
Than all the house, wife, husband, son, and daughter,
Ran out behind and hid among the trees
For fear I'd ask them for a cup of water.

"Surely one of them will help me, though the others are so niggard," said Ali-Nur; but he found not one of the ten who would give him so much as a crust of bread. So, intoning these lines:

Man is a tree of golden oranges
Which all his friends delight to cluster under;
But as the fruit falls to them by degrees,
Their flight's like lightning and their scorn is thunder.
Nor can I call this a disease in nature
When it applies to every living creature.

he returned downcast to Sweet-Friend and told her what had befallen. "Did I not say it would be so, my master?" she answered, "My advice to you now is to sell all the furniture and costly ornaments which we have in the house. We could live on them a long time." Ali-Nur did as she suggested, but soon there was nothing left in the house for him to sell. When they were again penniless, Sweet-Friend threw her arms about the neck of Ali-Nur, who was weeping, and said: "Master, why do you weep. There still remains that same Sweet-Friend whom you called the fairest of all Arab women. Take me down to the market and sell me. You cannot have forgotten that your father payed ten thousand dinars for me; if God is good to us, I may fetch even more now. As for our separation, if Allah wills that we come together again, we shall come together." "Sweet-Friend," answered Ali-Nur, "I could not abide to lose you even for an hour." "I do not wish it either, dear," she said, "but necessity is a very powerful law. A poet has said:

Know that the attempted thing is worth
Your soul's full stretch, whate'er it be;
For though you own no king on earth,
Remains our lord, Necessity."

Ali-Nur here took Sweet-Friend in his arms and kissed her hair and the tears on her cheeks, reciting this song:

One look from your dark eyes
Viaticum supplies,
I take from my last kiss
Wine for all drynesses,
And from one smile
Food for a hundred mile.

Sweet-Friend then spoke with such gentle persuasion to Ali-Nur that she won him to her plan, showing him that there was only one way by which he, the son of Fadleddin, son of Kahkan, might escape shameful poverty. So he took her down to the slave market and said to the cleverest broker there: ‘‘I would have you know the value of her you are about to sell; I do not wish there to be any mistake about it.’’ ‘‘O Ali-Nur, my master, I am your servant and will do the best by you that I can,’’ answered the broker, leading them both into a room in a near-by khan. Here Sweet-Friend lifted the veil from her face and the broker cried: ‘‘By Allah, this is the slave Sweet-Friend whom I myself sold to the late wazir two years ago for ten thousand dinars!’’ ‘‘It is the same,’’ answered Ali-Nur. Then said the broker: ‘‘My master, each carries round his neck a destiny and may in no wise rid himself of it; but I swear that I will use all my cunning in selling your slave and get you the highest price in the whole market.’’

Immediately the broker ran to the usual meeting place of the merchants and waited for them there. At that time they were scattered all over the market, but very soon they assembled at that point which the broker had chosen, where Turkish, Greek, Circassian, Georgian, and Abyssinian women were collected for sale. When all the buyers were assembled, the broker climbed on to a great stone, crying: ‘‘Merchants, rich gentlemen all! Not every round thing is a nut, not every long thing a banana, all is not meat that is red, or fat that is white, all that is rosy is not wine, nor every brown thing dates! O famous traders of Bassora and Baghdad, today I put up for your consideration so rare a pearl of price that all your money put together would not equal her worth. See her for yourselves, gentlemen! Now what price shall we say for her?" He let them all take a good look at Sweet-Friend and the bidding began at four thousand dinars. "Four thousand dinars I am bid, gentlemen, for this pearl among white slaves!" cried the broker, and immediately a merchant called out: "Four thousand five hundred!"

Just at that moment, the wazir Sawi passed on horseback through the slave market and, seeing Ali-Nur standing by the broker, said to himself: "This wastrel is probably selling the last of his slaves, after having got rid of all his furniture." Then, hearing the price which was being asked for the white slave, he continued: "He has not a penny; he must be selling that young woman we have heard so much about. If that is so, what joy, what joy is mine!"

Straightway he hailed the broker who, recognising him, ran up and kissed the earth between his hands. "I myself will buy the slave," said the wazir. "Bring her quickly to me that I may inspect her." The broker, who dared not disobey, brought forward Sweet-Friend and unveiled her before the old man's eyes. Seeing the woman's unparalleled face and form, the wazir marvelled and asked what price had already been bid. When he was told that the second bid was four thousand five hundred dinars, he cried: "I will buy her at that price!" at the same time looking so fixedly at the other buyers that they dared not raise his price for fear of his well-known vengeance. "Well, broker, why are you standing still?" added the wazir, "I take the slave for four thousand dinars and you may have the five hundred for your brokerage."

The broker answered not a word, but went with hanging head to Ali-Nur and said: "Master, we have not been fortunate! The slave has gone for a ridiculous price. Your father's enemy, the wicked wazir Sawi, must have guessed that she is your property. He insists on taking her at the second bidder's price and none of the merchants dare to bid against him. If he were likely to pay, we might thank Allah for a small mercy; but this abandoned wazir is the worst payer in the whole world. I have known all his shifts and evasions for longer than I care to remember. This is what he will do: he will write you a cheque on one of his agents and send word to him not to pay you. Each time you go there the agent will say: 'Tomorrow!'; but that tomorrow will never come. When you are tired out with his delays, you will let him take the cheque in his hands and he will straightway tear it up. Thus you will not get a penny for your slave."

Ali-Nur was furiously angry at this and asked the broker what could be done. "I have a plan which I think will get you out of your difficulties," answered the broker, "I will walk with Sweet-Friend towards the middle of the market; you must run after us and, snatching her away from me, say to her something of this sort: 'Where are you going, wretched woman? You know that I am only doing as I swore to do, pretending to have you sold at the slave market to humble you out of your evil behaviour.' Then you can give her a slap or so and take her away; so that the wazir and every one else will believe that you simply brought her here in fulfilment of an oath." "That is an excellent plan," agreed Ali-Nur.

The broker then took the slave by the hand and led her to the wazir, saying: "My lord, her owner is that young man just behind us. See, he is coming this way." As he spoke, Ali-Nur approached the group and gave Sweet-Friend a blow with his fist, saying:

"Where are you going, wretched woman? You know I am only doing as I swore to do, pretending to have you sold at the slave market to humble you out of your evil behaviour. Go home and try to be less disobedient in future. Do you think I need the money you would fetch? Even if I were in want, I would rather sell the last least thing I have than put you up to auction."

The wazir Sawi cried out, on hearing these words of Ali-Nur: "You young fool, you speak as if you had a least last thing remaining. All of us know that you are penniless." With that he made as if to seize the girl by force; but all the courtiers and merchants looked enquiringly at Ali-Nur, whom they knew and loved for his good father's sake. Ali-Nur said to them: "I call you all to witness that you have heard this man's insolent words!" While the wazir said: "Good friends, it is only on your account that I do not kill this insolent fellow with a single blow." The merchants, hearing both sides, consulted each other with their eyes and, deciding to back up Ali-Nur, cried: "This is none of our business; arrange it as best you can." On this Ali-Nur, who was naturally both courageous and splenetic, leapt for the wazir's bridle and threw his enemy to the earth. He knelt on him and rained blows upon his head and belly; then spitting in his face, he cried: "Dog, son of a dog, bastard! curses upon your father, and your father's father, and your mother's father; O swine, O filth!" Lastly, he gave the wazir one smashing blow in the mouth which knocked out several teeth, so that his beard was dyed with blood where it was not black with mud.

The ten slaves who were with the wazir drew their swords and were about to cut Ali-Nur in pieces when the crowd prevented them, saying: "Do not mix yourselves in this affair! Your master is a wazir, but his foe is the son of a wazir. When they are reconciled it will be bad for you." So the slaves prudently abstained from interfering.

When Ali-Nur was tired of beating the old man, he took Sweet-Friend by the hand and went up to his own house, followed by the plaudits of the crowd.

The wazir got to his feet covered, to the great delight of the people, with mud and blood and dust; and made his way to the sultan's palace. Pausing at the lower end of the hall of King Muhamad bin Sulayman, he cried: "Oppression! Oppression!" The sultan recognised his wazir and asked who had dared so to maltreat him. Sawi wept and answered:

"Shall I be torn by savage hounds
And you not think
Or heed?
Shall I go thirst, while others drink,
O sacred cloud from off whose bounds
Falls rain at need?

Master, such things are committed against all you love and allow to serve you." "But who has done it?" asked the king. Sawi answered: "My lord, I went this morning to the slave market to buy a cookmaid in place of the one who habitually burns my meals, and there I beheld a young slave more beautiful than anything I have seen in my life. I asked a broker who she was and he told me that she belonged to young Ali-Nur, son of your late wazir Fadleddin. Perhaps, my lord, you remember giving the son of Kahkan ten thousand dinars to buy you some perfection among slaves? It appears that this was the slave he bought; but, finding her in every way admirable, he gave her to his son Ali-Nur who, since his father's death, has wasted every penny of his inheritance in riotous living. Therefore he had been forced to put his mistress up for sale. When I found that four thousand dinars had been bid for her, I thought to buy her myself for my king, who had provided her original price; but, when I bid four thousand dinars, Ali-Nur ran up to me crying: 'Death's head! Calamitous and unjust old man! I would rather sell her to a Jew or a Christian, even if you filled her veil with solid gold.' 'Young man,' I answered, 'I do not buy for myself, but for our master, our benefactor, the king.' At that he became more angry still, and, throwing me off my horse, began to beat and maltreat me in every way, in spite of my great age and the respect due to my white beard, until I became even as you see me now. It would never have happened if I had not wished to please my king and buy him a slave who was already rightly his, one worthy of his bed."

On finishing his recital, the wazir threw himself at the king's feet and wept for justice. Sweat stood out upon the sultan's forehead between his eyes; he made a single sign to those who were around him and on the instant forty armed guards, with great and naked swords, stood before him. The king said to them: "Go to the house of Fadleddin, who was my wazir, and destroy it utterly; bind Ali-Nur and his slave and drag them here by ropes." The forty guards bowed and set out upon their mission.

Now one of the young chamberlains about the palace, called Sanjar, had been a mameluke of Fadleddin, brought up with Ali-Nur whom he had learnt to love. Chancing to be in the king's presence when Sawi entered and the sultan gave his orders, he slipped out and ran through side-streets until he came to the youth's house. Ali-Nur hearing a violent knocking, opened the door himself and would have embraced his friend Sanjar; but the young man put him aside, saying: "Dear master, this is no time for friendly words and greetings. Hear rather what a poet has said:

Pull up the roots of your soul and flee away;
Torn and in exile she is better
Than held in fetter
On her native clay.

God spreads the vast of His carpet for your feet
Woven of rainy hills and valleys,
Gardens and alleys
Lillied and complete."

"What are you telling me, Sanjar?" asked Ali-Nur, and Sanjar said: "Rise up and flee with your sweet slave. The wazir Sawi spreads a net for your feet and, if you fall therein, he will kill you. The sultan has sent forty of his guards with naked swords against you two. Flee at once, lest worse befall!" Then, handing a fistfull of gold to Ali-Nur, he continued: "Here are forty dinars, master; pardon me that it is not more. But you lose time. Escape, in God's name."

Ali-Nur hastened to warn Sweet-Friend and, when she had wrapped herself in her veils, the two left the house and came, by Allah's help, undetected to the sea-side. There they found a ship ready to set sail. The captain stood amidships, crying: "If any have good-byes to make, or food to buy, or a forgotten thing to fetch, let him do it now, for we are off!" All the passengers answered that they were ready, and the captain was just crying: "Drop your moorings!" when Ali-Nur approached and asked him whither he went. "To the home of peace, to Baghdad," answered the captain.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Thirty-fourth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the captain answered that he was going to Baghdad, the home of peace, Ali-Nur and Sweet-Friend went aboard. At once the ship spread all her sails and left the harbour like a great white bird. A poet has written:

Behold the ship!
She races the wind
And is victorious,
A bird with white wings,
Lighting and balancing on the sea.

We will leave Ali-Nur and Sweet-Friend on board her, wafted by favourable winds; and return to Bassora.

The forty guards invested the whole of Ali-Nur's house, searching every inch of it for the fugitives. Finding no one, they destroyed the house piecemeal and returned to report to the sultan, who gave them orders to search the whole city. Then he called Sawi to him and gave him a magnificent robe of honour, saying: "None but I shall avenge you, I swear it."

Later, after the wazir had wished him a long and peaceful life, he ordered criers to go throughout the city and proclaim: "If any light upon Al-Nur, son of the dead son of Kahkan, and hale him before the king, he shall receive a fair robe of honour and a thousand dinars. If any hide him, his head shall answer for it." But in spite of all these steps, none could find out where Ali-Nur had gone.

The ship which carried the two lovers arrived safely at Baghdad and the captain said to them: "This is that famous city of Baghdad, the home of sweetness! She lies beyond the assaults of winter, sleeping in the shade of her roses in an eternal Spring, with flowers and gardens and the murmur of many streams." Ali-Nur thanked the captain for all his kindness and, giving him five dinars for their passages, led Sweet-Friend towards the city.

It was decreed that Ali-Nur, instead of taking the ordinary road, should chance on that one which leads into the middle of the gardens which surround Baghdad. Soon the two stopped at the gate of a garden surrounded by a high wall, outside which all was well swept and watered and furnished with benches. The shut door was of exceeding beauty, hung about the top with coloured lamps and having a fountain of bright water beside it. The approach to this door lay between two lines of posts which held brocaded flags flapping in the wind.

"This is a fair spot," said Ali-Nur, and Sweet-Friend answered: "Let us rest on one of these benches for an hour." So they climbed to the top of one of the high seats, after having washed their faces and hands in the refreshing waters of the fountain. As they sat delighting in the tender breeze, sleep came to them; so they covered their faces and slept.

Now the garden at whose door they slept was called the Garden of Delight, and in its midst was a palace, called the Palace of Marvels. Both belonged to Haroun Al-Rachid and, when the khalifat was sad, it was his wont to come to the garden and the palace to forget his cares. The palace consisted of but one great hall, pierced with forty-five windows, in each of which was hung a brilliant lamp. In the middle of the hall was a great lustre of solid gold. The place was never opened save on the coming of the khalifat; but on his arrival the lustre and all the lamps were lighted, the windows thrown open and the great diwan spread with silk and golden velvet. Seated upon this, the khalifat would listen to his singers and musicians until the delight of their artistry, the calm of the night, and the cool suavity of the flower-laden breeze, widened his chest again and brought him joy. But more especially did he delight in the voice of his favourite singer, illustrious Ishak, whose songs are known over all the world.

The khalifat had appointed a good old man as guardian of the palace and gardens, one, Ibrahim, who kept careful watch to prevent indiscreet promenaders, and especially women and children, from entering the garden to spoil or steal the flowers and fruit. That evening he was making his usual slow round of the garden when, chancing to open the great gate, he saw two people asleep on one of the benches, their faces covered with the same covering. In great indignation he cried: "What! can these audacious people dare thus to flout my lord's commands? They little know that the khalifat has authorised old Ibrahim to punish any who approach this palace most severely. To think that they should make use of a bench reserved for the sultan's own people!"

With that the old man cut a pliant branch and, going up to the sleepers, made it whistle in the air above their heads. He was about to give them a good thrashing when suddenly he thought: ''Ibrahim, Ibrahim, what are you doing? Would you whip people of whom you know nothing, who may be strangers, or beggars upon the road of Allah, whom He has guided to your presence? First I must see their faces.'' He lifted their covering and started back in delight at the sight of two faces, fair with sleep, more lovely than all the flowers of his garden. ''What shall I do?'' he asked himself. ''Yes, what shall you do, O blind old Ibrahim? You ought to be whipped yourself for your unjust anger.''

After a few moments of consideration, the old man covered the faces of the sleepers and, sitting on the ground before them, began to massage the feet of Ali-Nur, for whom he had taken a sudden liking. Ali-Nur woke up suddenly on feeling his hands and, seeing that he who treated him so bountifully was an old man, withdrew his feet in shame. Then he leapt from the bench and, taking the old man's hand, carried it to his lips and then to his brow. ''My son, whence do you two come?'' asked Ibrahim. Tears started to Ali-Nur's eyes as he replied: ''My lord, we are strangers.'' ''My child,'' said the old man, ''I am not one of those who forget the commands of the Prophet, on whom be the prayer and peace of Allah. He has written in many places in his Book that we should be hospitable to strangers and receive them with a cordial heart. Come then, my children, I will show you my garden and my palace, so that you may forget your troubles.'' ''Whose is the garden, my lord?'' asked Ali-Nur, and the sheikh Ibrahim, so as not to frighten him, and perhaps also from a little vain-glory, replied:

"The garden and the palace are mine. I received them as part of an inheritance." The two young people followed him and he led them into the garden.

Ali-Nur had seen very splendid gardens in Bassora; but he had never dreamed that there could be one like this. Away from the great door led arches of carved wood, covered with climbing vines, from which hung heavy masses of grapes, some red as rubies, others black as ebony. The alley in which they walked was shaded by trees, bending under the weight of ripe fruit. In their branches birds piped their aerial music; the nightingale drew out her sweet complaint, the turtle-doves sang love songs, the blackbird whistled like a boy, the ringdove murmured as if drunk with wine. Each fruit-tree was represented by the richest of her kinds. There was sweet-almond and bitter-almond apricots, together with apricots of Khorassan; the fruit of the palm-trees fell crimson like the lips of girls, the mirabelles were sweet as sugar; there were red figs, white figs, and green figs all together.

The flowers were pearl and coral; there were roses fairer than the cheeks of a first love; violets looked like sulphur burning in the night; white flowers of the myrtle shone there with stocks and gilli flowers, anemones and lavender. Their heads shone in the dew; the camomile laughed to the narcissus with all her lips; the narcissus looked at the rose with deep dark eyes. Citrons hung down like splendid cups, lemons were lamps of gold. Everywhere lay the coloured carpets of a thousand flowers, for Spring reigned in the garden; nourishing streams moved through the grass like silver snakes, waterfalls tinkled, birds sang to each other and then fell silent waiting for a reply. The South wind murmured like a flute and the West wind answered with a sound of piping.

Thus was the garden as Ali-Nur and Sweet-Friend saw it with the sheikh Ibrahim. Soon the old man, who did not wish to do things by halves, led them into the Palace of Marvels itself.

They stopped on the threshold, their eyes dazzled by the splendour of what they saw; for indeed there was never such a hall in all the world; such riches or such taste in the arrangement of them. For a long time they examined the place and then looked out of one of the windows to rest their eyes from such bright splendour. As Ali-Nur leant there, the moon shining over the garden reminded him of his past honours and he said to Sweet-Friend: "Indeed, my love, this place is very pleasant to me; for it recalls only pleasant things. Peace has fallen upon my soul and the fire which burned about my heart has sunk to a spark only."

The sheikh Ibrahim brought them things to eat and they feasted abundantly; then, after washing their hands, they returned to the window and stood looking out. Soon Ali-Nur turned to his host, saying: "O Ibrahim, have you no drink to give us? Surely it is usual to drink after eating." Ibrahim brought them a porcelain cup filled with fresh water, but Ali-Nur said: "That is not quite the kind of drink I wanted." "Is it wine you wish for?" asked the old man. "Certainly it is," said Ali-Nur. "Allah protect me from its snare!" said Ibrahim. "For thirteen years I have not touched the wicked stuff, for the Prophet (on whom the peace and prayer of Allah), has cursed them who taste fermented drink, him who makes it, and him who sells it." "I can resolve your difficulties in two words," said Ali-Nur. "If I can show you a way of complying with my request without either drinking, making, or buying wine, will you be accursed?" "I think not," answered the other, so Ali-Nur continued: "Take these two dinars and these two dirhams, mount your ass and ride to the market. Stop before the shop of a rose-water seller; for such folk always keep wine at the back of their shops; and call on the first passer-by to purchase two dinars' worth of wine and keep the two dirhams for himself. He will load the wine upon the ass and we shall drink it without your suffering the least stain in the sight of God." The old man laughed aloud at this suggestion, saying: "By Allah, I have never met a more charming or witty fellow." "Then," said Ali-Nur, "in God's name, do as we require."

On this old Ibrahim, who had not wished his guests to know before that there was great stock of fermented liquor in the palace, said to Ali-Nur: "My friend, here are the keys of the cellar. It is always kept filled in case the Prince of Believers should visit his palace. Enter and help yourself to all you need."

Ali-Nur entered the cellar and stood thunderstruck: along all the walls and in great racks were ranged row on row of golden flagons, silver jars, and crystal bottles, crusted with every kind of gem. The young man chose the rarest wines and set out the bottles on the carpet by Sweet-Friend's side; then, pouring wine into gold-circled cups, sat down himself. While they drank together and regarded all the splendour round them, Ibrahim brought them perfumed flowers to crown their cups and then, as there was a woman present, sat down far away from them. Soon wine brightened the cheeks of the lovers, their eyes wantoned like those of gazelles, and Sweet-Friend let down all her hair. It was not long before old Ibrahim became jealous of their happiness, saying to himself: "Why should I sit far off when I may never find another chance in all my days to feast with two such beautiful young people?" He therefore got up and moved nearer to them and then, on Ali-Nur's invitation, sat frankly down beside them. The young man filled a cup of wine and offered it to Ibrahim, saying: "Drink this generous wine, old man; joy is at the bottom of the goblet." "Allah save me from its snare, young man," answered Ibrahim, "I have not tasted it for thirteen years and in that time I have twice made the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca."

Ali-Nur, who very much wished to make him drunk, took two or three cups himself and fell over as if asleep. Sweet-Friend then looked sorrowfully at the old man and said: "See, Ibrahim, how he behaves towards me. It is always the same. He drinks and drinks and then sleeps; so that I am left without a companion in my cups. How can I enjoy the wine when I have no one to drink with me, or sing when there is none to hear?" Softened by her burning glances and her singing voice, old Ibrahim replied: "I must confess it does not seem a very gay way to drink." Sweet-Friend filled a cup and, handing it to him with a languorous glance, said: "Drink to please me. I will be so grateful." Ibrahim drank one cup and then a second; but when Sweet-Friend poured him out a third, he answered that he had already drunken enough. Nevertheless she gently insisted and leant over him, saying: "As Allah lives, you must." So he took the cup and was carrying it to his lips when Ali-Nur burst out laughing and sat up.

At this point Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly left the rest of her tale for the morrow.

But When
The Thirty-fifth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that Ali-Nur burst out laughing, saying to Ibrahim: "What are you doing? Did I not beg you to drink just now and did you not refuse, telling me some great tale about a thirteen years' abstention?" The old man was ashamed and hastened to explain that Sweet-Friend had made him drink. The two young people laughed afresh and Sweet-Friend whispered to Ali-Nur: "Leave me alone, and do not mock him. We shall have a good laugh presently." So saying, she poured a cup for herself and one for Ali-Nur; and the two went on drinking round after round without paying any attention to the old man. At last Ibrahim could contain himself no longer and called out: "This is a strange way to invite people to drink! Have I got to look on all the time?" At this the hilarity of the other two knew no bounds and the three drank together in great amity until a third of the night had passed.

At length Sweet-Friend asked Ibrahim's permission to light one of the candles in the lustre. "One only, one only," answered the old man, who was already half drunk; but Sweet-Friend lit all the eighty candles and returned to her seat. Then Ali-Nur asked leave to light one of the lamps, and proceeded to light the whole eighty, including the forty-five in the windows, without Ibrahim taking the least notice. Thus the whole palace and garden were one blaze of light and Ibrahim, who was now quite reckless with his drink, rose, saying: "You are two pretty scamps!" and himself threw open all the windows. Afterwards he sat down with the two lovers and drank again, making the hall ring with laughter and song.

Now Destiny, which lies between the hands of God, the Hearer, the Maker, had decreed that the khalifat Haroun Al-Rachid should be looking out, just at that time, from a window of his palace on the Tigris, enjoying the moonlight and the cool of the night. Chancing to look across the water, he saw a great glare in the sky and, not knowing what to make of it, called for his grand wazir, Giafar Al-Barmaki. When Giafar came, the king cried: "Dog of a wazir, is this how you inform yourself of what passes in my city? Baghdad might be taken by assault and you not know it. Do you not see, wretch, that my Palace of Marvels is all lighted up; that someone has had the impudence to light all the lights and throw open all the windows? How can I be khalifat of Baghdad when such a thing can come to pass?" "My lord," said Giafar, "even if it were so, who can have told you of it?" "Look for yourself," said the khalifat; so Giafar looked from the window and lo! the Palace of Marvels shone like a fire across the river and dimmed the lustre of the moon.

The kind-hearted Giafar, imagining that this was some imprudence committed by old Ibrahim to make a little money, said to the khalifat: "Prince of Believers, old Ibrahim came to me last week and, saying that he was most anxious to perform the rites of circumcision for his son during your life-time and mine, begged leave to have the rites performed in the Palace of Marvels. I told him to go forward with his preparations and that I would ask your leave; but somehow the whole affair slipped from my mind." "That is not one fault but two," replied the khalifat, "not only did you forget to tell me, Giafar, but you did not fulfil poor old Ibrahim's desire. His request only meant that he would like some money for the necessary expenses, but you gave him none yourself and deprived me of the chance of doing so." "O Prince of Believers, I forgot," repeated the wazir.

"You are pardoned," said the khalifat, "but now, by the virtue of my fathers, I swear that I will spend the rest of the night with old Ibrahim. He is a good man, a religious man; the elders love him. I have heard that he feeds the poor; I am sure that at this moment he sits within the hall surrounded by holy men. If we visit him, some one of them may make a prayer for us which will be of benefit in the hereafter. At any rate Ibrahim will be delighted by the honour of our presence." "But the night is far spent, my lord," said Giafar, "his guests will be on the point of departure." "Nevertheless, I shall go," said the king; and with that Giafar had to be contented, though he mightily feared the upshot of the expedition.

Without more ado the khalifat set out towards the Garden of Delights, followed by Giafar and Masrur, the executioner, all three being carefully disguised as merchants.

The khalifat, who went first, found the great gate of the garden open and turned to Giafar, saying: "He has left the gate open; that is not like old Ibrahim." When they had crossed the garden and come to the outside of the palace, the khalifat turned to Giafar again, saying: "First I must see without being seen by all the holy guests of this faithful old man, so that I may take stock of who is there and what rich presents Ibrahim has given to each. But it seems that they must be deeply absorbed in their ceremonies, for I hear no sound of praying." So saying, the khalifat climbed, with Giafar's assistance, into a high nut-tree and raised himself branch by branch until he could look through one of the windows.

He saw a youth and a girl more beautiful than twin moons (glory be to him who made them) and old Ibrahim, the keeper of his garden, sitting between them with a wine cup in his hand. The old man was saying: "Queen of all beauties, one does not taste the full savour of the wine without a song. To start that marvellous voice of yours, I will myself sing you a trifle. Listen:

O night, O eyes of love!

Never drink without a song,
Grooms who take a horse to water
Whistle it along.

O night, O eyes of love!

Never, never drink at all
Save with girls to make your passion
Great as they are small.

O night, O eyes of love!"

The khalifat, seeing and hearing old Ibrahim busied about a song which sorted ill with his white hairs, felt the vein of anger swell between his eyes. He hurried down from the tree and fixed Giafar with a piercing glance, saying: "Never have I been so edified as by this group of holy men, piously performing the ceremonies of circumcision. The night is full of salvation; climb up and take some share of the blessing for yourself." Giafar did not know what to make of this, but he climbed into the tree as he had been told.

When he saw the three drinkers: Ibrahim singing and waving his cup, Ali-Nur and Sweet-Friend looking, listening and laughing: he felt that at last his time had come. He climbed out of the tree and threw himself down before the Prince of Believers. "Praise God, Giafar," said the khalifat, "who has made us of those who ardently follow the way of salvation, and has removed the unrighteous from about our path, as we may see tonight. You are silent, Giafar; you know not what to answer? Joking apart, I desire to know what has brought these two young strangers here, for I have never seen such beauty, such bodies, such gestures or such charm. I pardon you, Giafar, I pardon you. Let us both climb into the tree and see what more they do." With that they both ascended to the branch opposite the window and again looked in.

Ibrahim was saying: "My queen, this wine of the south slopes has destroyed my unbecoming gravity for good and all; but I shall not be truly happy until I hear you pluck the cords of harmony." "How can I pluck the cords of harmony, my friend, without a lute?" said the girl, and straightway Ibrahim rose and left the hall. "What is the old rascal about now?" whispered the khalifat to Giafar. But Giafar answered: "I know no more than your majesty."

Ibrahim returned in a few moments carrying a lute which the sultan recognised as belonging to the glorious Ishak, his favourite singer. "This is too much!" he cried, "I will hear her sing; if she sings badly, I will crucify the lot of you, O Giafar; if well, I will spare the others and kill only you." "Allah grant she know not how to sing!" cried Giafar. "Why is that?" asked the astonished king. "Because bad company is better than none, even in crucifixions," said the wazir, and the khalifat laughed silently.

The young girl took the lute and tuned it skilfully; then, after she had played a low sweet melody which would have set the soul to dancing in a dead man and melted the heart of rocks, she sang:

O night!

When they saw my thirst appeased
Where the fountain of love bubbled:
Lo, they said, the spring is troubled.

O eyes of love!

Therefore is my love displeased,
Let him go, I shall not scold him;
Wanton memories shall hold him.

O night!

Sweet-Friend went on playing the lute after she had finished her song and it was all the delighted khalifat could do not to cry out: "Bravo!" or "O night!" Turning to Giafar, he said: "Never have I heard so beautiful or so thrilling a voice!" "Then I trust," said Giafar, "that my lord's anger has all departed." "It has departed," said the khalifat. The two climbed down from the tree and the sultan said: "I am determined to enter the hall and hear the young slave sing again." "But, my lord," objected Giafar, "if you go in as you are, the two young people will be confused and the old man die of fright." "If that is so," said the king, "you must think out some plan by which I can discover the whole matter without being recognised."

While Giafar was racking his brains, the khalifat walked towards a sheet of water which lay in the middle of the garden. This water communicated with the Tigris and held a multitude of fishes which came up to enjoy the food which was thrown to them. Once the khalifat had seen many fishermen collected about this water while he was looking out from the Palace of Marvels; so he had commanded old Ibrahim to allow no fishermen into the garden and to punish any who disobeyed the order.

That night a certain fisherman called Karim, who was well-known up and down the Tigris, had seen the garden door open and had said to himself: "Now is my chance for a little good fishing." As the khalifat approached, he was standing by the lake watching his net and singing:

O you who go with heavy bales
Beneath a press of sounding sails,
Pity the fisher by his nets at sea:
Under a night of stars,
Weary and worn he wars,
That you may eat your fish in luxury.

Night-long he sees the heaving breasts
Of his nets on the water crests
And never any other breast sees he;
While you wake with the day
Beside a sleeping may
Whose breasts are like the sun upon the sea.

Yet my laborious nights and days
Are consecrated to His praise
Who gives each man a station carefully;
By Whose eternal wish
Ther're some to eat the fish
And some to catch them in the nets at sea.

As Karim finished his song the khalifat came up behind him and, recognising him, cried out: ''Karim!'' The fisherman turned and saw the sultan standing there in the moonlight. Quaking with terror he said: ''As Allah lives, O Prince of the Faithful, I have not done this through disobedience but because of poverty and a great family.'' ''That is well, Karim,'' said the khalifat, ''I have seen nothing. Now cast your net in the water that I may have notice of my luck.'' Joyfully the fisherman threw his net, calling upon the name of Allah, and waited for it to sink. When he drew it to shore, it was bursting with a multitude of fishes of all kinds. ''Good!'' said the sultan. ''Now undress yourself.'' Karim hastened to do so; he drew off his deep-sleeved robe, patched with a miscellany of rags and jumping alive with every kind of bug and enough fleas to cover the whole earth; next he took off his turban which had not been unwound for three years. As the months went by he had sewn chance rags and tags of stuff to it and now it was full to bursting with great and little lice, black and white lice, lice of all colours and all sizes. When he stood naked before the khalifat, the latter also undressed; removing his first robe of Iskandar silk, his second robe of Baalbek silk, his velvet mantle, and his embroidered waistcoat, and put on the fisherman's robe and turban. Wrapping the head-veil about his chin, he said: ''Put on my clothes and go your way.'' Thereupon, Karim improvised these stanzas:

My thanks shall swell in lasting tones
Because your gift is choice;
While I'm alive I'll praise you with my voice
And when I'm dead by rattling of my bones.

Hardly had Karim finished speaking when the khalifat felt all the skin of his body violently attacked by the bugs and lice which lived in the rags. He started throwing them from him with both hands, casting them by multitudes from his neck and breast with expressions of horror. "Miserable Karim!" he cried to the fisherman. "How have you collected all these deadly beasts?" Then said Karim: "My lord, in a week's time you will not even feel them." "How, must I wear this terrible garment for a week?" asked the sultan laughing. "My lord," answered Karim, "I have a thing to say, and yet dare not." "Speak," said the khalifat. "An idea has struck me, Commander of the Faithful," said Karim, "I believe that you wish to learn how to earn your living as a fisherman. If that is so, you could not have better clothes than mine."

The khalifat laughed again and, dismissing the fisherman, covered all the fish in the palm-leaf basket with fresh grass and went to rejoin Giafar and Masrur. When Giafar saw him coming he said: "What are you doing here, Karim? I advise you to go away at once, as the sultan is in the garden tonight." At this Haroun Al-Rachid laughed so much that he fell over on his backside, at which Giafar cried out: "By Allah, it is the king!" "It is, good Giafar," answered the sultan, "and you, who live ever about me, do not recognise me. How then will Ibrahim recognise me when he is drunk? Wait for me here."

The khalifat knocked at the palace door, and old Ibrahim rose, crying: "Who is there?" "It is I, Karim the fisherman," answered the khalifat, "I heard that you had guests, so I have brought you some fine live fish."

Both Ali-Nur and Sweet-Friend were very fond of fish, so when they heard this talk of fresh and living fishes, they called delightedly to Ibrahim to open the door. He did so, and the disguised khalifat entered with many respectful greetings. Ibrahim, seeing who it was, laughed and called out: "Welcome, robber! welcome, thief! welcome, poacher! Let us have a look at these wonderful fish." The khalifat lifted the grass and showed the wriggling leaping catch. "They are excellent! Would that they were fried!" cried Sweet-Friend. "You are right," said Ibrahim. "Why did you not bring them here fried, O fisherman? Take them, cook them, and bring them back." "I hear and I obey!" said the khalifat, and, as he went out, all three called after him: "Fry them, fry them, and bring them back!"

The khalifat found Giafar and told him what had passed. "I will fry them myself, Prince of Believers," said the wazir. "By the tomb of my fathers, I will fry them," insisted the khalifat. With that he went to the little hut of reeds where Ibrahim lived and hunted about until he found frying-pans, butter, salt, thyme, laurel, and all else that he needed. He went to the fire saying: "Remember, O Haroun, how you were ever about the kitchen as a boy, delighting to help the women. Now is the time to show your skill." He put butter in the pan, and, while waiting for it to boil, cleaned, washed, and salted the fish and covered them lightly with flour. When the butter was piping hot, and not before, he placed the fish in it. After one side was done, he turned each piece with infinite art, and, when the other side was coloured a crisp brown, spread all the fillets on fresh green banana-leaves. Lastly, he took lemons from the garden, and, garnishing the leaves with slices of them, carried all to the three in the palace.

Ali-Nur, Sweet-Friend, and old Ibrahim ate all the fish and, when they had washed their hands, Ali-Nur said: "It is a good deed that you have done tonight, O fisherman." Then he drew out three of the gold dinars which the faithful Sanjar had given him at Bassora and, handing them to the fisherman, continued: "Excuse, in Allah's name, the poverty of my thanks. Before some things which came to pass had come to pass, I would have freed you from the bitterness of thrift for ever. As it is, I can only give you these." The khalifat kissed the coins and then pressed them to his forehead, in sign that he thanked both God and the giver.

All this time the sultan's desire to hear the young slave sing again had been increasing, so, slipping the money into his pocket, he said to Ali-Nur: "I will never forget your generosity, young master; but dare I ask a further thing, that which I most desire in all the world? I long to hear this young girl play upon the lute and sing a song; lute-playing and singing are more than life itself to me."

Ali-Nur turned to Sweet-Friend, saying: "If my life is dear to you, sing something for this fisherman." So Sweet-Friend took the lute and, playing a brilliant prelude on the strings, sang this:

Wind-blown like a reed,
Playing and singing
She stood before us.
The deaf took heed
As the notes came ringing,
The dumb made chorus.

She went on playing so melodiously when her song was finished that those who heard her nearly wept; then she smiled and broke into a second song:

Your eyes chased all the shadows from our house;
Your boyish foot trod on our sill:
It is singing and shining still.
Would I not scatter over all our house
Rare gum and musk-rose and rare gum again,
If that would make you come again?

Sweet-Friend sang this song so pleasantly that the heart of the khalifat was moved within him, and he cried: "Good, by Allah! Good, by Allah! Good, by Allah!" "You like her singing and her playing, then?" asked Ali-Nur. "Indeed I do!" replied the khalifat; so the young man who, as we have seen, was accustomed to give his guests anything that pleased them said: "Since you find her to your liking, O fisherman, she is yours. I am not one of those who give and then take back. She is yours as a free gift." He rose and, throwing his cloak about his shoulders, was about to leave the hall without saying a word of farewell to Sweet-Friend, in order that the fisherman might take possession of her on the spot. But Sweet-Friend looked at him with her eyes full of tears, saying: "Ali-Nur, would you cast me aside and leave me thus without a word of farewell? Stay but for a moment; speak to me; listen to me:

Blood of my heart,
Who lie between my breast-bone and my womb,
Would you depart?

God of pity,
Let death be the enchanted lover whom
You send to me."

Ali-Nur drew near her and answered:

"Her tears are falling as I go away
And how will I do far from her she asks:
To answer that is one of the sweet tasks
Of him who stays behind with her, I say."

The khalifat was both grieved at being the cause of the separation of these two young people and surprised at the ease with which Ali-Nur could part with her. "Tell me, young man, for I am old enough to be father: are you afraid of being arrested and punished for having stolen this slave from someone?" asked he. "The damsel and I have gone through stranger adventures than that," answered Ali-Nur. "If our sorrows were written with needles on the corners of eyes, yet they would be a lesson to the circumspect." "Let me hear all," said the khalifat, "for you never know when succour may be at hand and the consolation of Allah is never far off." "How would you like to hear my story, fisherman," asked the young man, "in verse or prose?" "Prose is embroidery on silk," answered the khalifat, "but verses are a thread of pearls." "Let it be pearls, then," said Ali-Nur, and, shutting his eyes, he improvised these lines upon the spot:

"I am far from the bed of my mirth
And the land of my birth,
My father who walked the earth
(Whose soul may Allah save!)
With silvered virtues such as the saints have
Lies long in the cold grave.
But before he died
He gave me a slave to bride
For whom I sighed.
I lived in sweet expense
With a plentiful lack of sense,

And I date my ruin thence.
There was much gentle strife
Between us; to save my life
I consented to sell my wife.
But an old goat tried to buy her,
Without letting the folk bid higher,
So I rose up in my ire
And beat him about the face.
He was a man of place
And plotted my disgrace.
A friend I had at the king's
Hinted at terrible things,
So I took the sea's white wings.
I am beggared in your city
Save for my sweet-voiced, witty,
Young and scented and pretty
Girl of the rose's hue.
If I give her to you,
I am giving my heart's blood too."

"So much for this fair series of pearls, my master," said the khalifat, "now let us have a little of the silk embroidery of your tale." So Ali-Nur told him all his story with full details, still thinking that he spoke to Karim, the fisherman.

When the khalifat understood the whole tale, he asked Ali-Nur what he intended to do. "The roads of Allah are wide roads," answered the other. "Listen to me, young man," said the khalifat, "I am only a lowly fisherman, yet I can sit down now and write you a letter to take to the sultan of Bassora which will have very happy consequences for you."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Thirty-sixth Night
Had Come

SHAHRAZADE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that Ali-Nur answered the khalifat in these words: "Who has ever heard of a fisherman writing to kings?" "I will explain all the mystery," said Haroun Al-Rachid. "When I was a child I learned to read and write in the same school and under the same master as Muhamad bin Sulayman Al-Zayni. I learnt more quickly than he did to say the Koran by heart and to write beautifully, but we remained great friends, though he has become a king and I am a simple fisherman. He has never been proud or ceased to correspond with me. I have but to ask a thing for him to do it." "Write then, in God's name," said Ali-Nur, "that I may see if it advantages me."

The khalifat sat down cross-legged upon the floor and, spreading a sheet of paper over his left palm, wrote the following letter:

"IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MERCIFUL,
THE COMPASSIONATE!"

And after!

"This letter is sent by me, Haroun Al-Rachid, son of Mahdi of the race of Abbas, to my tributary Muhamad bin Sulayman Al-Zayni, who is wrapped with my grace and a king over one of my kingdoms through my kindness.

The bearer of this is Ali-Nur, son of Fadleddin bin Kahkan, lately your Wazir, now dwelling in the clemency of Allah.

When you have read this, come down from your throne and anoint Ali-Nur king in your place. The authority I gave to you, I now invest in him.

Let there be no delay.

Peace be with you."

The khalifat sealed this letter and handed it to Ali-Nur without telling him what was in it. The young man folded it in his turban, after having kissed and carried it to his forehead, and set out immediately for Bassora, leaving Sweet-Friend to weep her heart out in a corner.

Old Ibrahim, who had said nothing all this while, now turned to the khalifat, crying: "Most evil of all fishermen, you brought us two or three wretched fish worth twenty copper pieces, and not content with receiving three golden dinars, you want to add this young girl to your price. But I know a trick worth two of that. You shall halve the money and share the girl with me; and what is more, I shall be the first to embrace her."

The khalifat threw a terrible glance at old Ibrahim and, going to one of the windows, clapped his hands. His two companions rushed in; Masrur threw himself upon Ibrahim and Giafar handed a magnificent robe, which he had sent for in haste, to the khalifat, who straightway threw aside his rags and dressed himself in silk and gold.

Ibrahim recognised the sultan and began biting his finger-ends for shame; but even then he was not sure whether he was awake. "What a state is this?" asked the khalifat in his ordinary tones. The old man came out of his drunkenness on the instant and threw himself face downward on the floor, crying through his dusty beard:

Let clemency begin
Before your heart can harden.
You have the power to pardon,
I, *but the power to sin.*

"I pardon you," answered the khalifat, and turning to Sweet-Friend, saying: "My dear, now that you know who I am, let me lead you to the palace." With that all of them left the Garden of Delights.

At the palace the khalifat gave Sweet-Friend a chamber to herself and appointed servants and slaves to attend her. When she was settled in her new quarters, he said to her: "Sweet-Friend, for the time being you belong to me, because I desire you and because Ali-Nur has given you to me. I have recompensed him with the kingship of Bassora and very soon, if Allah wills, shall send him a costly robe of honour. You will bear it to him and reign by his side as queen."

He then took Sweet-Friend in his arms and they lay lovingly together all night.

When Ali-Nur arrived, by the grace of Allah, at Bassora, he went directly to the palace of the sultan, and cried a great cry. The sultan hearing the cry commanded the messenger to be brought to him, and, when he recognised the writing of the khalifat in the letter, stood up and carried the paper three times to his lips and to his brow. He read the lines attentively and said: "I hear and I obey; for the voice of the khalifat is the voice of God." He called the four kadis of the city and the emirs, and was about to resign his throne in their presence when the wazir Sawi came into the hall. The sultan showed him the letter and bade him read it. Sawi did so and then with a quick movement of his hand tore off the bottom of the paper which bore the khalifat's black seal, chewed it in his mouth, and spat it to the ground. "Miserable Sawi!" exclaimed the sultan in flaming anger. "What devil possessed you to do that?" "My lord and king, this rascal has never seen the khalifat or his wazir," answered Sawi. "He is a gaolbird, a vicious trickster. He must have found an odd scrap of our lord's writing and forged this letter. If the khalifat had sent him, he would have provided him with a true king's letter, written out fairly by the palace scribes, and with some chamberlain or wazir to bear him company." "What shall I do then?" asked the sultan, and Sawi answered: "Trust the young man to me and I will learn the truth. I will send a chamberlain with him to Baghdad; if what he says is true, he can bring us back an official letter; if not, I will find a way to make him pay in full for all his misdeeds."

Sawi went on talking to the sultan in this strain until the latter grew to believe that Ali-Nur was really guilty of forgery. He flew into a violent rage and called to his guards to seize the young man and beat him. They threw him to the earth and rained blows upon him till he fainted. Then, at the sultan's orders, they chained him hand and foot and fetched the chief gaoler into the royal presence.

In the king's name the wazir ordered the gaoler, Kutayt, to throw Ali-Nur into the deepest dungeon and to torture him night and day. Answering that he would do so, Kutayt led the young man to gaol.

But, when they were in the cell, Kutayt shut the door, swept the ground and, cleaning a bench near the door, covered it with a thick carpet. Then, approaching Ali-Nur, he took off his chains and bade him repose himself on the bench, saying: "Master, I have not forgotten the generosity of your father. Fear nothing!" Thereafter, for forty days, he treated Ali-Nur with every consideration and at the same time sent a daily bulletin to the wazir describing the terrible tortures and beatings which the young man was supposed to be suffering.

On the forty-first day, a magnificent present came to the king of Bassora from the khalifat. As bin Sulayman was not able to understand the exceeding richness of it or why it was sent, he called his emirs and asked their advice. Some suggested that the gift was meant for the young man who had claimed to be the new sultan and this reminded the king of Ali-Nur's existence. Then said the wazir Sawi: "My lord, did you not decide that it would be better to get rid of this fellow?" "By Allah, so I did!" said the sultan. "Send for him immediately and cut off his head." Sawi then asked leave to have the following announcement cried through the public streets: "Let all those who wish to see the execution of Ali-Nur, son of Fadleddin, son of Kahkan, assemble straightway outside the palace." The sultan gave him permission, and he departed with his heart refreshed by gratified hatred.

When the announcement was made in the city, all the people wept: the merchants in their shops, the little children in the schools. Some ran to the palace to see the sad spectacle of the death itself, and others hurried in a crowd to the gates of the prison to make a procession when Ali-Nur should be led out.

The wazir Sawi took ten of his guards and, hastening to the prison, demanded admittance. But Kutayt pretended not to know why he had come and asked what he wanted. "Bring me that young villain whom

I entrusted to you forty days ago,'' said Sawi, and the gaoler answered: ''He is far gone with all the blows and tortures, but I obey.'' He made his way to Ali-Nur's cell and found him murmuring these lines:

Walls rise about my guilt,
My life is done,
My blood is spilt,
The measure of my heart is nearly run.

There is none to save
The remnant of my breath,
I pant for the sweet grave
And thirst after the sleepy cup of death.

Guide to the feet of Saints,
Master above,
My spirit faints,
I sink within your love.

Kutayt explained what had happened, to Ali-Nur and, helping him off with his own clothes, dressed him in a prisoner's rags and led him out to the wazir. Ali-Nur saw his foe trembling with rage and understood how lasting was his hatred. Nevertheless he spoke up boldly, saying: ''Here I am, O Sawi. Do you think that Destiny will always be on your side? It has been written:

They sat on a high seat
And snipped the robe of Justice by the hem;
But now they lie with folded feet
And the worms out-argue them.

Allah alone disposes; remember that, O my enemy!'' ''Do you think, O Ali, that you can put me out of countenance with all your quotations?'' said the wazir.

"I would have you know that I am going to cut off your head in spite of all the dogs in Bassora. As you would say, I am going to follow the advice of a certain poet:

Let time do what it will,
I shall do ill.

Another poet has beautifully written:

Who sees his foe lie dead, the same
Scores one point in the game."

With that he ordered his guards to throw Ali-Nur on to the back of a mule; yet they hesitated because the crowd called out to Ali-Nur as soon as he appeared: "Say but the word and we will stone this man; we will tear him to pieces if we died for it!" But Ali-Nur called back: "Do not do so, my friends. Remember rather what the poet has said:

Fate has determined on a minute
And I die in it.
Before that time let fifty savage
Wood-lions ravage
About my fearless feet, for I,
I cannot die."

The guards hoisted Ali-Nur on the back of a mule and led him through all the city, crying: "Thus forgers die!" until they came to the sultan's palace. Here Ali-Nur was stationed on the place of blood and the executioner, with a drawn sword in his hand, approached him, saying: "I am your slave. If there is anything I can do for you, tell me now and I will do it; for your life lasts only until the sultan puts his head out of the window.'' Ali-Nur looked to right and left and cried aloud these lines:

Is there none
To strike a stroke with the sword
Against this horde?
He can be my lord.
Is there none?

Is there none,
Is there none of you all
With a hand to stay the fall
Of death's down-tottering wall,
Is there none?

Is there none
To fill cold water up
In a simple cup
For my dying lips to sup?
Is there none?
Is there none?

The crowd began to weep and the executioner himself handed a glass of water to Ali-Nur. But the wazir Sawi jumped from his place and broke the cup, crying in a furious voice: ''What are you waiting for?'' So the executioner bandaged the young man's eyes and all the crowd rose, as it were a sea of indignation, and their threats and curses against the wazir grew and grew like the sudden coming of a storm. Ali-Nur's last moment seemed to have come, when the noise of an approaching troop was heard and a great cloud of dust was seen to be sweeping towards the palace.

At this moment, the sultan put his head out of the window and, seeing the dust, told those about him to go and find out what it meant. "Let us cut off this head first!" cried Sawi, but the sultan said: "Be silent!"

Now that dust was raised by the feet of the horses of the wazir Giafar and his companions. The reason of their coming was this:

The khalifat, after one night of love passed in Sweet-Friend's arms, remained for thirty days without thinking of her once or remembering anything of the tale of Ali-Nur. There was no one to remind him; but on a certain night, as he was passing Sweet-Friend's apartment, he heard the sound of tears and a voice singing very low:

I may not meet
Your shadow, sweet,
But my tired lips repeat
Till dawn and twilight meet:
Sweet, sweet.
Like a dove: sweet, sweet,
Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet;
Because your name is sweet.

As the sound of the weeping was re-doubled after the song was finished, the khalifat opened the door and entered the room. When Sweet-Friend saw him she threw herself weeping at his feet and kissed them three times. Then she said:

O royal golden tree,
Down-bending carelessly
  With blood-red fruits of kingship for the needy,
You gave a promise to me;
If you would not undo me,
  Oh, fulfil it, oh, fulfil it, and be speedy!

But still the khalifat did not recall her and asked who she was. "I am the gift of Ali-Nur, son of Kahkan," answered Sweet-Friend. "May I beg my lord to fulfil the promise which he made of sending me back honourably to Ali-Nur? I have been here for thirty days without tasting the nourishment of sleep." At these words, the khalifat sent in haste for Giafar, and said: "It is thirty days since I have heard any news of Ali-Nur. I think it possible that the sultan of Bassora has put him to death. But I swear by my head and by the tomb of my fathers that I shall kill anyone who has harmed the young man, even though he were my greatest friend. I wish you to set out instantly for Bassora and bring me news of how Muhamad bin Sulayman has treated Ali-Nur."

Giafar set out and arrived at Bassora as has been related. Hearing the cries and lamentations of the excited crowd, he asked the reason of these things, and a thousand voices told him what had happened to Ali-Nur. Giafar hastened into the palace and wished the sultan peace, saying: "If any harm has come to Ali-Nur, I am ordered to kill his oppressor and to take full vengeance on you also, O sultan. Tell me now, how is it with the young man?"

The sultan sent for Ali-Nur from the place of execution and no sooner had he entered the palace than Giafar ordered the guards to arrest the sultan and his wazir Sawi. He named Ali-Nur king of Bassora and set him on the throne instead of Muhamad Al-Zayni.

Giafar abode for three days of ceremony with the new king of Bassora; but, on the morning of the fourth day, Ali-Nur told him that he greatly desired to set eyes again upon the Prince of Believers. Giafar approved his wish and, after the saying of the morning prayer, they both set out for Baghdad accompanied by a numerous retinue and haling Muhamad bin Sulayman and Sawi along with them. Through all the long journey the wicked wazir had plenty of time to reflect and to bite the fists of repentance.

Ali-Nur rode joyfully beside Giafar until the company reached Baghdad, the home of peace. As soon as they arrived, Giafar told the whole story to the khalifat, who bade Ali-Nur approach and said to him: "Take this sword and cut off the head of your enemy, the miserable son of Sawi." So Ali-Nur took the sword and went up to the false wazir. The latter looked at him, saying: "O Ali-Nur, I have behaved towards you according to my character. Do you now behave towards me according to yours." So Ali-Nur threw down the sword, and, saying to the khalifat: "Prince of Believers, he has disarmed me," bitterly quoted this couplet:

I saw my foe was noble, so I found a way of beating him
By acting very nobly and by generously treating him.

The khalifat cried to Masrur who approached the wazir, Al-Muin, and cut off his head with a single blow. Then Haroun Al-Rachid told Ali-Nur to ask for whatever recompense he wished, and the young man answered: "Master, I desire no kingdom; nor will I willingly have anything to do with the throne of Bassora. I shall consider that I have attained the greatest happiness of my life if I may remain near your majesty for the rest of my days." "That is well spoken, and sits close to my heart," answered the khalifat. He sent for Sweet-Friend and returned her to Ali-Nur; also he showered riches upon both of them, gave them one of the fairest palaces in all Baghdad, and appointed them a magnificent pension from the treasury. He made an intimate friend of Ali-Nur and pardoned the sultan Muhamad Al-Zayni, re-establishing him upon his throne and warning him to be more careful in future whom he chose as wazir. They all lived in joy and prosperity until their deaths.

"But," continued the wily Shahrazade, "do not believe, O King, that this story of Ali-Nur and Sweet-Friend, pleasant though it be, is as marvellous as the tale of Ghanem bin-Ayub and his sister Fetnah!" "I do not know that tale," answered King Shahryar.

THE TALE OF GHANEM BIN-AYUB AND HIS SISTER FETNAH

And Shahrazade said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that there was once long ago a rich merchant called Ayub who had two children. The son's name was Ghanem son of Ayub, known afterwards as the Slave of Love. He was as beautiful as a moonlit night and combined great eloquence with the most musical voice. His sister was called Fetnah, that is to say seduction, because she was so fair.

When Ayub died, he left great riches to his children . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirty-seventh Night
Had Come

She said:

When Ayub died, he left great riches to his children. There were, among other things, a hundred loads of silks, brocades, and precious fabrics, and a hundred vessels of pure musk pods. These were wrapped up and plainly directed: TO BAGHDAD; for Ayub had meant to take them to be sold in that city.

Young Ghanem decided, on his father's death, to go to Baghdad himself, so he said good-bye to his mother, his sister, and all his relations, and left for that city with a caravan of merchants, taking his bales with him, loaded upon hired camels.

He arrived by Allah's good grace at the City of Peace, and hired a beautiful house which he furnished with fine carpets, cushions, curtains, and couches. He saw to the unloading of his merchandise and then rested in his house until the traders and notables of Baghdad paid him visits of welcome.

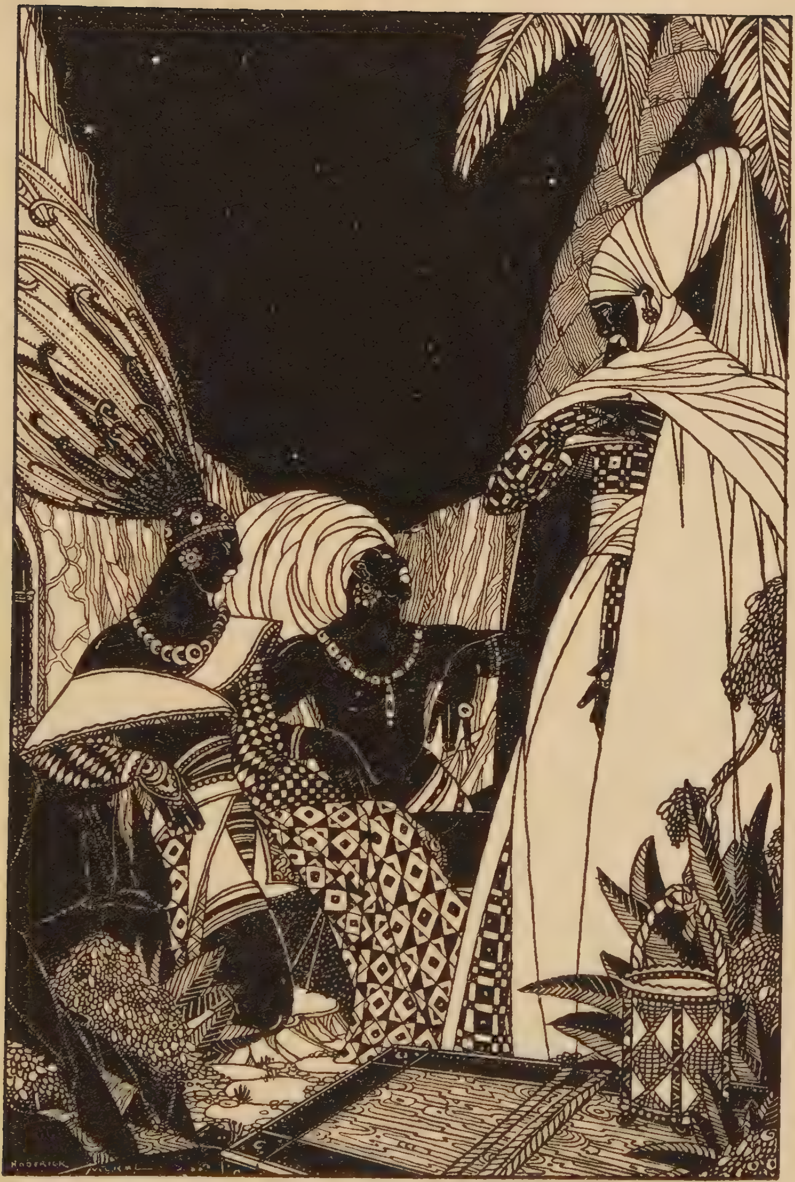
Later, he went down to the market bearing a package of ten fair silk embroideries, each marked with its price; and was honourably received and entertained by the merchants. The chief of the market, after one glance at his goods, bought them on the spot for a sum which gave Ghanem a profit of two dinars for one. This delighted him and he continued for a whole year to make daily sales of fabrics and musk pods at the same advantageous rate.

One day at the beginning of the second year, he went down to the market as usual; but found all the shops shut and the great gates closed. As it was no feast day, he asked the reason for this, and was told that, one of the principal merchants having died, the others had all gone to take part in his funeral. Being advised by a bystander to acquire merit by attending the obsequies himself, Ghanem made the necessary ablutions in a near-by mosque and hurried after the procession. He accompanied the mourners to the great mosque where the usual prayers were said and then walked with them out of the city to the place of tombs.

The relations of the dead man had spread a great tent over his tomb and hung it with torches and candles, so that the mourners might collect under cover. They deposited the body in the tomb and covered it again. Then the imans and readers of the Koran recited the usual chapters of the Book, while the crowd sat round in reverent silence. Ghanem stayed to listen with the others although he was in a considerable hurry to return home.

The ceremonies ended only at nightfall; and after they were finished, slaves brought abundance of meats and pastries to the mourners who ate and drank until they could hold no more. Lastly they washed their hands and sat round the tomb in silence.

As no one seemed likely to make a move until morning, Ghanem, who was very afraid lest his house—which was that of a stranger and one reputed rich—should be pillaged by robbers while he was away, excused himself on the plea of urgent business and left the assembly. He managed to make his way back to the city gates in the dark, but, as it was already midnight, he found them closed. No sound was to be heard save the barking of dogs, the far-away yelping of jackals, and the howling of wolves, so Ghanem became afraid and said to himself: "There is no power or might save in Allah! I feared for my goods; but now I fear for my life." With that he went back on



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"Ghanem Bin Ayub and his Sister Fetnah"

his tracks to hunt for some shelter for the night and came at last to a tomb surrounded by four walls, in the midst of which grew a palm-tree. The granite door was open, so Ghanem entered and lay down to sleep. Nevertheless, he could not close his eyes for fear of thus being among the dead; so he rose and looked out of the door. He saw a light coming towards him from the city, which seemed to be making for the tomb; he therefore shut and locked the door and climbed up into the top of the palm-tree. The light came nearer, and soon he could make out three negroes, two carrying a great chest, and the third bearing a lantern and a spade.

The man holding the lantern stopped with a gesture of surprise when he was quite near the tomb, and one of the others said: "What is the matter, Sawab?" "O Kafur," answered Sawab, "do you not see that the door which we left open this evening is now shut and locked?" The third negro, whose name was Bakhita, broke in saying: "What a fool you are! Do you not know that the owners of these fields when they come to visit them in the day lock themselves in the tombs at night for fear lest wicked black men should roast and eat them?" "That is absurd, Bakhita," said the other two; but Bakhita answered: "You will not believe till we have gone into the tomb and found someone there. I will tell you a further thing; if anyone is there now, he has seen our light and climbed up into the palm-tree. We will find him in the palm-tree."

"Allah confound all Soudanese negroes!" said Ghanem to himself, "There is no power or might save in Allah! How am I going to get out of this fix?"

The two negroes tried to persuade Sawab to climb over the wall and unlock the door, promising to cook specially for him the fattest person they found inside, without letting a drop of grease escape, but Sawab refused, saying: "I may be a fool, but it seems to me much better to throw the chest over the wall since we have been ordered to get rid of it inside the tomb." "But it will break," objected the other two. "Possibly," answered Sawab, "but if we go inside ourselves we may find a band of brigands hidden there. They often frequent tombs to share their booty." "You are an idiot to think of such things," said the other two; and, setting down their burden, they climbed over the wall and opened the door while Sawab held the light. They dragged the chest inside the tomb, reclosed the granite door, and sat down to rest. "We have had a long journey," said one of them, "and are tired enough with all this scaling of walls and opening and shutting of heavy doors; besides, it is midnight. Let us rest awhile before digging the grave and hiding the unknown contents of this box. I suggest that, as we are three black eunuchs met together, each of us should tell the story of his castration. Thus the night will pass pleasantly."

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning, and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirty-eighth Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that the three Soudanese negroes agreed to tell the tales of their castration and that Sawab was the first to speak:

THE TALE OF THE NEGRO SAWAB, THE FIRST SOUDANESE EUNUCH

When I was five years old, my brothers, I was brought to Baghdad and sold to one of the men-at-arms about the palace. He had a little girl of three, with whom I was brought up. All the people of the house were delighted that I was never tired of amusing the child with comic dances and all the songs I knew. Every one loved the little negro.

We grew up together without being separated until I was twelve and she was ten.

One day I found her in a retired spot, and went up to play with her as was my wont. She had just come from the hammam and was scented deliciously; her face shone like the moon upon its fourteenth night. She ran up to me and we began to play a thousand childish games together. She seemed filled, that day, with some spirit of evil for she acted with a boldness and wantonness that at first frightened me, then pleased me. We played boisterously and began to imitate a game we had seen older people playing. You know when children play naughtily they uncover themselves. This we did. Allah, who is all wise, alone can explain our knowledge of the ways of evil. It is planted within us and grows untended, uncared for. That which happened happened, suddenly, almost without our fully knowing what we did. For as the game progressed I gradually lost all consciousness of its danger and my companion and I played at it almost as if it were a thing we were accustomed to through long practice.

The little girl was soon laughing and kissing me again, but I was terrified and ran away as hard as I could.

While I sought refuge with a negro of my acquaintance, the little girl re-entered the house. As soon as her mother saw her disarranged clothes she became alarmed, she cried out and made a close examination. When she found what she found, she fainted from grief and rage; but when she came to herself she took every precaution to hide the irrevocable accident from her husband and from everybody else. For two months she waited quietly, trying to lure me back to the house with little gifts, and when at last I returned she continued to hide the matter closely; for she loved me and did not want me killed.

It was not long before the mother managed to affiance her daughter to the young barber who waited on her husband. She paid the dowry and the wardrobe out of her own pocket, and soon the marriage-day arrived. Then came the young barber with his instruments. He favored the idea. Thus I became a eunuch. After the marriage ceremony I was given to my young mistress as her slave, to accompany her wherever she went; and all the time the mother had managed things so well that no one guessed the secret. Through her guide and with divers tricks the bridegroom and all the wedding guests were convinced of the purity of the bride. The women guests accorded her the honour of those wedding tears shed only for a young girl.

After that, I lived with my mistress in the barber's house and enjoyed rendering her all service. I loved my little mistress continually until the time of her death, even though she had caused me to fall from my man's estate. Then when her husband, her father, and her mother had all entered into the peace of Allah, I became the property of the treasury, and was numbered among the eunuchs of the palace. That is how

I am able to be with you tonight, my brothers.

Such is the story of my emasculation: and may peace be with you.

Sawab fell silent and Kafur, the second negro, told the following tale:

THE TALE OF THE NEGRO KAFUR, THE SECOND SOUDANESE EUNUCH

Brothers, when my story begins I was only eight years old, but I was already an accomplished liar. I never told more than one lie a year, but it was always of such comprehensive brilliance that my owner, who was a slave-merchant, used to drop down flat on his backside when he heard it. At last he could stand me no longer, so he had cried through the market: "Who will buy a little negro with one fault?" A certain merchant asked what my fault might be and, when he was told that I lied once every year, bought me, fault included, for six hundred dirhams and twenty brokerage.

My new master dressed me in fitting clothes which became me very well; and I lived with him for the rest of that year. All that year I told nothing but the truth. For I had told my one lie while still with the old master. When the new year came, it was seen that she was full of fruitful promise for field and orchard, so the merchants gave feasts to each other in the gardens outside the city. When my master's turn came, he had abundant food and drink carried to his suburban garden and royally entertained his friends from morning till night. But it so happened that he had left something at his house, so he commanded me to mount my mule and ride back to the city. I was told to ask my mistress for the forgotten thing and then to return with all speed.

As soon as I drew near the house, I began to cry aloud and to shed great tears so that the people of that quarter flocked around me; women put their heads from the windows, and my mistress rushed to open the door to me, followed by her daughters. All of them asked me the cause of my grief and I answered through my tears: ‘‘My master was with his guests in the garden; he went to do something against the wall, and the wall fell on him and destroyed him. I leapt upon my mule and came to you.’’ Hearing this news, my mistress and her daughters wailed and tore their robes and beat their faces until the neighbours ran round to comfort them. Then my master’s wife, to show her grief at the sudden death of the lord of the house, began, as is usual in such cases, to set the building in confusion; to break the shelves and the furniture, to throw all that might not be broken out of the windows, and to tear down the doors. She smeared all the walls with mud and indigo, crying out to me to help her in the business of grief. I did not need to be invited twice, but set to with a will to destroy the presses, the heavier furniture, and all the china. I burnt all the beds, the carpets, the curtains, the cushions; and then took hold of the house itself, wrenching and hacking away at the ceilings and the walls until the whole was a ruin. And all the time I did not cease to weep and cry: ‘‘My master, oh, my master!’’

My mistress and her daughters next tore away their veils and ran out into the street with uncovered faces and dishevelled hair. They commanded me to lead them to the place where their lord was buried under the ruin of the wall, as they wished to coffin him and give him a noble funeral. I went before them crying: "My master, oh, my master!" and soon a huge crowd joined themselves to us, the men mourning and the women weeping with uncovered faces and disordered hair. I took great pleasure in leading them through every street in the city, so that more and more men and women, children, maidens and old grannies, joined themselves to our band, crying, when they heard of the disaster: "There is no power or might save in Allah!"

Soon certain of our followers advised my mistress to tell her grief to the wali; so they all turned aside to seek him while I went forward alone towards the garden.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Thirty-ninth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that the eunuch Kafur continued his story in these words:

While I ran towards the garden, the women told the wali of their grief, so he mounted on horseback and, commanding workmen to follow him with spades and sacks and baskets, joined the mourning crowd which was hastening along the road I had pointed out to them.

I threw earth on my hair, beat my face, and approached the garden, crying: "My poor mistress, my poor little mistress, my poor young masters!" I rushed into the middle of the guests with an extravagant show of grief, yelling: "Ah, who will help me? What woman will ever be so good as my poor mistress?" Naturally my master changed colour when he heard me and asked what had happened. "Master," I answered, "I came to the house and found that it had fallen in ruins about my mistress and your children." "But my wife was saved?" he cried. "Alas, she was not!" I answered. "No one escaped. Your eldest daughter was the first to go." "But my youngest daughter?" he questioned. "Dead, dead!" I replied. "But my mule?" he cried next. "No, master, no," I said, "the walls of the house and the walls of the stable fell upon all you owned with life in it, even upon the sheep, the geese, and the hens. There is nothing beneath the ruins but a mass of dead flesh. Nothing is left alive." "But my eldest son?" he cried. Then said I: "No one is left alive. You have neither house nor family, nor the least remaining trace of either. As for the sheep, the geese, and the hens, the cats and dogs are gorging upon them this moment."

Light changed to darkness before my master's eyes, his back relaxed and he wavered upon his limbs. He tore his clothes, pulled out his beard by handfuls, threw his turban far from him, and beat his face until the blood came, crying: "My children, my wife! My grief, my extravagant misfortune!" and all his guests flocked round him weeping and wailing and tearing their garments.

Staggering like a drunken man and still beating himself about the face, my master hurried from the garden followed by all the merchants; but the first thing that he saw was a great cloud of dust from which proceeded lamentable cries. Presently from out the dust appeared the wali and a great crowd of folk who wept and hurried forward.

The first person whom my master met, as he ran to meet these people, was his own wife. When he saw that she was followed by all his children, he laughed like a madman. His family threw themselves upon his neck, crying: "Husband!" Father!" "Thank God that you are safe!" "Are you all well, my dears?" cried he. "What happened to you in the house?" "Thank God that I look upon your face again!" cried his wife. "How did you save yourself from the ruins of the wall? We are all safe and well; nothing has happened save the terrible piece of news announced by Kafur." "What news is that?" asked my master; and his wife answered: "Kafur came to the house in a terrible state of grief, telling us that you had gone aside to do something against the wall, and that the wall had fallen upon you and crushed you."

"But as God lives," broke in my master, "Kafur came to me just now and told me that the house had fallen on you all and killed you!" So saying he turned and saw me pouring earth upon my head, weeping, tearing my garments, and throwing my turban afar off, first to one side and then to the other. He ran up to me, crying: "Miserable slave, ill-omened blackamore, son of a whore and a thousand dogs, cursed child of a cursed race! Why have you plunged us all into such terrible grief? As Allah lives, I will tear your skin from your flesh and your flesh from your bones!" Fearlessly I answered: "I defy you to do me the least harm. You bought me with my fault before witnesses. You were particularly told that my fault was the telling of one lie a year, and, let me assure you, that this is only half a lie; I shall hold the other half in reserve and complete my lie in some other manner." "Vilest of all blacks!" cried my master, "do you call that only half a lie? Son of a dog; I free you; you are no more man of mine!" "You free me, do you?" I answered. "Well, I shall not free you, until my year is up and I have achieved the other half of my lie. Then, if you like, you can sell me again, with fault; but as for freeing me, you cannot do that because I know no trade. That is the law."

While we were speaking, the crowd formed round us, the wali and all the merchants joining it. My master explained what had happened, adding: "That, I beg you to observe, is only half a lie." His hearers, thinking that the matter was too serious to be called half a lie, loaded me with curses, but I stood there laughing and said to them all: "I was bought with my fault. How can you blame me?"

When we came at last to the street in which my master lived, he saw a heap of ruins where his house should have been and, being told by his wife with some exaggeration that I had done all the damage, he waxed even more furious than before. "Bastard son of a bitch!" he cried. "If this was a half-lie, what would one of your whole lies be like? I should imagine a couple of cities would be destroyed by one of your really good whole lies." With that he haled me before the wali and I tasted an artistic meal of stick, till I fell down in a faint.

During my unconsciousness, a barber was sent for who castrated me completely and cauterised the wound with red-hot irons. I woke to find myself a eunuch for good and all, and to hear my master saying: "You destroyed things which were very dear to me; I have destroyed things which were very dear to you." Later he took me to the market and sold me for a much greater price than I had fetched before, because I was a eunuch.

Since that time, I have sown as much discord and trouble as I could in all the houses where I have been employed as eunuch, so that I have been constantly moved on from one master to another, one emir to another, one notable to another, until at last I am in the service of the Prince of Believers himself. But I am very much reduced now; my old strength has failed me.

That brothers, is the story of my castration. I have finished. Peace be with you.

When the two other negroes heard his story they mocked him, saying: "Rascal, son of a rascal, that was a splendid lie!"

Then Bakhita, the third negro, turned to his two friends and said:

THE TALE OF THE NEGRO BAKHITA, THE THIRD SOUDANESE EUNUCH

Know, O cousins of mine, that the two stories we have heard are useless and ridiculous. I will tell you about the destruction of my manhood and you will see that I deserved an infinitely worse fate. I violated a most sacred trust.

But the details of this happening are so extraordinary, so rich in savoury incident, that the tale is too long to tell you here. Morning approaches and we may get into very serious trouble if the light surprises us before we have dug a hole and buried this chest. Let us do the work for which we were sent and afterwards, when we are safely home again, I will tell you all the details of my sin, my castration and my repentance.

The negroes then rose from their rest and dug, by the light of the lantern, a hole large enough to contain the chest. Kafur and Bahkita dug while Sawab carried the earth out in a basket and threw it beyond the tomb. When the hole was sufficiently deep, they buried the chest, smoothed the earth above it, and hurried away with their tools and lantern.

Although Ghanem was alone at last and was very anxious to know what the chest might contain, he waited till dawn to climb down from the palm-tree. When light had fully come, he dug in the soft earth with his hands and lifted the chest out of the hole. Then, picking up a stone, he broke the locks and threw back the lid. Inside was a sleeping girl, drugged seemingly with banj, whose bosom rose and fell in regular breathing.

You have never seen a girl so beautiful, with such surprising delicacy of colour. She was decked from head to foot with gold and jewels; about her neck was a collar of solid gold, half hidden by bright stones; a single splendid gem hung from each ear, and there were diamond bracelets about her ankles and about her wrists. She was worth a sultan's ransom as she lay there.

When Ghanem saw that this girl had received no violence from the lecherous negroes who had buried her alive, he took her in his arms and laid her down in the open air. The life-giving breeze entered her nostrils, her colour deepened, and she sighed. Then she coughed and sneezed; so that there flew from her mouth a lump of banj, enough to send an elephant to sleep for twenty-four hours. She opened her eyes—ah, God, what eyes they were!—and turned their adorable glances upon Ghanem. She was still under the influence of the drug and very sweetly murmured: "Where are you, little Breeze? I am thirsty; give me something to drink. Where are you, Garden Flower, and you, Dawn? Where are you all, my ladies; Light on the Road, Night Star, Morning Star, Sweetness of Gardens? Why do you not answer?" As none spoke, the girl opened her eyes fully and looked about her. She cried in terror: "Ah me, unhappy! I am alone among the tombs! Who has taken me from among the beautiful curtains of my palace and thrown me upon the stones of the dead? That such wickedness can be! O Thou, from Whom no secrets are hid, O Avenger: I pray You bear this crime in mind upon the day of judgment!"

Ghanem, who had been standing silent all this time, now stepped forward and said: "Queen of beauty, whose name is doubtless sweeter than date juice, whose body is certainly more pliant than a palm frond, I am Ghanem bin-Ayub. There are no curtains here, it is true; but neither is there anything to fear. Our omnipresent Lord has sent your slave to make an end of all your misfortunes and lead you back into the way of happiness. Think a little kindly of me, O desirable." With that he fell silent.

The young woman perceived that he was real and not the creature of a dream, so she said: "I witness that there is no God but Allah! I witness that Muhamad is his Prophet." Then, turning her bright eyes on Ghanem, she placed her hand upon her heart and continued in a voice sweeter than water: "O thrice welcome youth, I have woken up in a strange place; can you tell me who brought me here?" Ghanem told her the whole story of the three negroes and begged her in return to make him acquainted with the circumstances which had led up to the crime. But she answered: "I praise God, who has raised me up a helper such as you. I beg you first to help me back into the chest and then to go out as quickly as you can and hire a mule. I can travel in the chest as far as your house without being seen, and when I get there I will not only tell you all my story, but will bring you more happiness and fortune than you can dream possible."

Ghanem joyfully left the tomb and, as it was now full day, found no difficulty in hiring a man with a mule and returning with him. He helped the man to load the chest upon the animal and, while they journeyed towards his house, his mind was filled with pleasant thoughts. He knew that he loved the girl and rejoiced to think that she would belong to him; seeing that she was worth a good ten thousand dinars in herself and had jewels and robes worth untold gold. When they arrived at the house he helped the muleteer to carry the chest indoors.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Fortieth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that Ghanem helped the girl out of the chest and she began to examine the dwelling in which she found herself. Seeing a well-built house, carpetted with joyous colours, and hung with silks of a thousand pleasant tints: rich furniture, fabrics of price, bales of merchandise, and vessels of musk pods, she realised that Ghanem was a great merchant; so she lifted the little veil from off her face and looked fixedly at the young man. She found him handsome and taking in his ways; so she loved him and said: "See, Ghanem, I have uncovered my face before you! But I am very hungry; I beg you bring me something to eat."

Ghanem hurried to the market and bought an exquisitely roasted lamb, a plate of the best pastries made by Hadj Sulayman himself, a plate of *halaua,* almonds, pistachios, fruits, jars of old wine, and flowers in varied abundance. Returning, he arranged the fruits in great porcelain dishes, the flowers in vases of price, and placed all he had bought before the young girl. She smiled and pressed herself close to him, throwing her arms about his neck and saying a thousand sweet things. Ghanem, who felt love growing in his heart by leaps and bounds, sat down with her; and the two continued to eat and drink until nightfall. All the time they became accustomed to each other and fell more and more in love, since they were of the same age and both beautiful. At nightfall, Ghanem lit candles and lamps all about the place, and the hall shone with a double splendour, because their faces were lighted with the flame of love. He brought stringed instruments and more wine; so that the time passed upon young wings, with songs, verses, laughter, and a thousand pretty games. As the hours slipped away their passion grew: glory be to Him who joins the hearts of men and women and brings lovers together in the night.

They joyed together until the dawn and then slept in each others' arms, without more than sleep befalling. As soon as he woke, Ghanem bought more entertainment of all kinds from the market, wishing to give his lover of the best. After they had eaten, they drank long and deep until their cheeks became red and their eyes shone black and brilliant. At length Ghanem, who ardently desired to kiss the girl and embrace her, asked leave to quench the fire in his entrails by touching her mouth with his lips. But she said: "Wait, my dear, till I am drunk and do not know what is happening. Then you may kiss me and I will not feel your lips touch mine."

Later, when the wine had overcome her modesty, she took off all her clothes save her drawers and a fine chemise and a little veil of white silk pounced with gold which confined her hair. Seeing her so, Ghanem called out in his desire: "My love, may I not kiss you now?" "O Ghanem that I love," answered the girl, "that is one thing which I cannot allow you; for there is a sinister word written upon the string of my drawers. I cannot show it to you yet." As Ghanem could not do what he wished, his passion knew no bounds; so he seized his lute and sang:

I begged a kiss from her red mouth,
A little kiss to cool my drouth,
One kiss to set my heart at rest;
But she said: "Talking is the best.
  No, no, no, no; no, no, no, no;
  Well-bred young men do not do so."

I must confess, I urged: "Yes, yes!"
So she said: "If by force you press
Your lips to mine, know, there's no bliss

In an unwilling or rude kiss.
No, no, no, no; no, no, no, no;
Well-bred young men do not do so."

I said: "A kiss against the will,
That has a touch of pleasure still,
It has a tang of mild delight."
But she: "Such kisses are not right.
No, no, no, no; no, no, no, no;
Well-bred young men do not do so."

Fire consumed Ghanem when he had made an end of this song; for the girl allowed him nothing, though she appeared to return his affection. He importuned and she denied till nightfall; when Ghanem rose and lit all the lights about the hall. Then he threw himself down before the girl and pressed his lips to her dainty feet. He plead with her in impassioned accents and implored her, with his eyes and with his tongue, to give him but a single kiss. She trembled like a bird with all its wings and Ghanem cried, with the tears of love filling the corners of his eyes: "Pity the slave of love, my mistress, the captive of your beauty. I was at peace before you came." "Light of my eyes," answered the girl, "I swear that I love you madly and that all my soul cries out for you. Yet you must never do this thing, for a reason which I will tell you to-night." Then she sank into his embracing arms and her pitiful eyes revealed how difficult were her denials. Thus they remained, talking and thinking of a thousand sweet follies, until the morning came without her having told her secret.

Day and night, with increasing passion, this frustrated love continued for a whole month, till, on a certain night when they were together and intoxicated with wine and pent-up emotions, Ghanem became more bold than was his wont. The girl seemed not to mind and Ghanem, encouraged, took even greater liberties. Thanking Allah for his mercies and delighted by his great good fortune, Ghanem gently took hold of the cord that held up the girl's pantalettes and made as if to loosen it. At this, the young woman sat bolt upright and asked him what he was about, in a most sober fashion. Ghanem answered her forthrightly. She was silent a moment, then answered: ''Listen, dear Ghanem, I do not wish you to judge me too hardly. Lest you think I am a mere coy wanton, holding you at bay that I may later enslave you to my greater profit, read, I beg you, that writing which is woven on this cord.'' Ghanem looked at the broad cord of her pantalettes and there he saw written in gold embroidery: I AM YOURS AND YOU ARE MINE, CHILD OF THE PROPHET'S UNCLE.

Ghanem withdrew his hand from the cord as if it had been a snake and the young girl said:

I am the favourite of the khalifat, Haroun Al-Raschid, even as it is written upon the cord. Although until I encountered you my soul was free and my heart had never submitted itself to any mortal not even to Haroun Al-Raschid himself yet for him I keep the savour of my lips and the mystery of my body. I am called Kut Al-Kulub, the Food of Hearts. I grew up from babyhood in the khalifat's palace and became so beautiful that he was enamoured of the handiwork of God as shown in me, gave me an apartment to myself and alloted ten delightful slaves to be my companions. He made me presents of all those costly things which you found upon me when I was buried, and preferred me even to his favourite wife Zobeida, so that she hated me.

One day when the khalifat was absent making war against a tributary who had rebelled against him, Zobeida corrupted one of my slaves, who had previously been in her own service, gave her a piece of banj, and commanded her first to drug my drink with it, and then, when I was asleep, to place it in my mouth. The girl, delighted by promises of liberty and gold, did as she had been commanded: I fell down in convulsions, my feet were drawn up to my head, and I thought that I was dying. The slave sent for Zobeida when she saw that I was fast asleep, and the queen bribed three eunuchs and the doorkeepers so that I was carried out at night and buried in the tomb from which you delivered me. Now I abide a thrall to your generous hospitality.

Only two things trouble me: the first, that I do not know what the khalifat will think when he comes back and does not find me; the second, that I am bound by the writing on the cord never to feel you in the depths of my being, O Ghanem, O beloved!

Such is my story. I pray you keep it secret.

Ghanem retired to the bottom of the hall out of respect for the khalifat when he heard that Kut Al-Kulub belonged to the Commander of the Faithful. As if she had become a sacred thing, he dared not look upon her; but sat alone in a corner bewailing his criminal intentions, his presumption in having touched the girl's royal flesh, and the calamitous love which had come upon him. Nevertheless he said: "Glory to Allah, who for His purposes lets grief work within noble hearts, while the wicked heart is merry." Then he intoned these lines:

Hearts held within the small hot hand of love
Burn, turn, and yearn,
The wits of him who shrines a girl above

Turn, yearn, and burn,
One kiss or two comes; if that's not enough,
Yearn, burn, and turn.

The girl went down to Ghanem, and, throwing herself upon his breast, strove to console him; but he did not dare to answer her tenderness because she was the favourite of the Prince of Believers. He let her do what she would, but did not return her kisses. She had not expected so sudden a change on the part of her lover, so she redoubled her caresses and with a yearning heart tried to make him answer that passion which his coldness had notably increased in her own heart.

But Ghanem repulsed her and, when morning had come, hastened to the market and was absent for a whole hour, laying in even more costly provisions than he had before provided when he did not know the rank of his guest. He bought all the flowers in the market, the finest of roast sheep, the freshest of pastries, those sweetmeats which were fullest of fruit juice, delicious creams, the ripest dessert, the biggest and most golden rolls.

Scarcely had he entered the house again when the girl ran to him, threw her arms around him and, with a smile, turned upon him eyes black with passion and swimming with desire. "By Allah, my darling, my heart," she cried, "you have been away a year! I can hold myself back no longer! My passion has become more than I can bear. Take me Ghanem, take me, or I die!" "Allah save me from doing so, my dear mistress," answered Ghanem, pushing her gently away from him. "Can a dog go up into the place of a lion; or a slave take that which belongs to the master?"

Sadly he sat himself in his corner; but she took him by the hand and led him to where the cloth was spread. They ate and drank together, and she saw to it that he became drunk. When he lay back, overcome with wine, she threw herself upon him and pressed against him. Allah alone knows a woman's wiles with a man. At last she took her lute and sang:

My dear
Is timid as a deer.
And yet a flying deer sometimes looks back.
My heart
Is given to a hart
Which snuffs the taint of love upon its track.
My hair
Is loosened for a hare,
A flying leaf, which lets me die of lack.

Ghanem wept for a little at these lines and the girl wept with him; then they drank and made verses together until the day's decline.

That night Ghanem made two beds far apart upon the floor instead of one, and answered Kut Al-Kulub's reproaches by saying: "That which is the master's cannot belong to the slave." But she cried out: "Away with this obsolete morality, my dear lord! Let us ensnare the flying love tonight! Tomorrow she will be gone. What will be, will be, O my heart's desire." But Ghanem would not. She burned the more and cried: "As God lives, we will lie together tonight!" But Ghanem would not. "Come, my beloved," she entreated, "all my heart lies open to you. My love is crying and calling towards you. Ghanem of my life, take these blossoming lips, this soul ripened by passion." But Ghanem would not. So the girl wept and took her lute and sang:

If love tonight shall show her face,
Welcome her, son, with fond embrace;
When rosy dawn comes, flushed and fair,
She'll far have flown perhaps for e'er.

I am slim,
I have a white limb,
Pleasing to all but him;
But he,
He does not care for me.

I never sleep,
My purple eyelids keep
Watch on a weary deep;
But he,
He does not care for me.

I am a tall
Flower-branch; each and all
Would wish to make me fall;
But he,
He does not care for me.

My love is a flying
Hind; the world is sighing
To be in at the dying;
But he,
He does not care for me

I am a flower
In the garden: at the hour
Of my scented fall in a shower
Of coloured petals, kings shall lower
And throw down their power;
But he, but he,
He does not care for me.

But Ghanem would not; though he was dying of desire. For another month he dwelt with Kut Al-Kulub, darling of the khalifat, without once doing to her that for which they both longed.

While the khalifat was away at the war, Zobeida could not fail to be troubled as to what would happen when he returned and asked news of Kut Al-Kulub. At last she sent for a cunning old woman, whom she had known from her infancy, and, telling her the secret, asked what she should do.

"I understand, my mistress," answered the old woman, "time presses and the khalifat will soon return. I could show you many ways out of your difficulty; the simplest and quickest is this. Get a carpenter to make a wooden dummy, and ceremoniously bury that within the palace. Have torches and wax candles lighted all about the tomb, clothe all your slaves and those of Kut Al-Kulub in mourning garments, and spread the corridors of the palace with black. When the khalifat asks the reason for this, tell him that Kut Al-Kulub is dead and that you have given her a funeral worthy both of him and her. The khalifat will weep bitterly and call readers to watch over the tomb and intone the Book above the dead. If by any chance he suspects you and has the tomb opened, you need not be alarmed; for he will find the dummy, covered with jewelry and precious stuffs, in a rich coffin. And if he wishes to touch her, all who are by can tell him that it is unlawful to look upon a naked woman who is dead. Then he will believe that his favourite has really departed to the peace of Allah. He will have the tomb closed again, and you will be quit of the whole business. I promise that this way will be successful, should Allah show Himself propitious."

Zobeida gave the old woman a fair robe of honour and much gold for her excellent advice and bade her carry out the project in her own way. A wooden dummy was made by the royal carpenter; the two women dressed it in the sumptuous robes of Kut Al-Kulub and fastened it in an expensive coffin. The fullest rites of funeral were undertaken; lustres, candles, and torches were lighted; and a costly dome was built above the tomb. Carpets were spread for those who prayed, the palace was strewn with black cloths, and all the slaves wore mourning; so that the news of Kut Al-Kulub's death spread through the palace and every one, even Masrur, believed it.

It was not long before the khalifat returned from his war, and, entering the palace, hastened first to the apartments of Kut Al-Kulub who filled all his heart. Seeing the slaves clothed in black, he started to tremble; and when Zobeida came to him, dressed also in black from head to foot and told him that his favourite was dead, he fell down in a swoon. He came to himself at length and asked for the tomb of his love, that he might visit it. "Prince of the Faithful," answered Zobeida, "for the love I bore her I buried her in my own palace." The khalifat went just as he was in his travel-stained garments and visited the tomb; seeing the candles and the torches and the carpets, he thanked his queen for her goodness and returned to his own apartments.

Nevertheless, as he was suspicious by nature, the khalifat soon began to be tortured by doubts and dark considerations. The tomb was opened by his orders, but, thanks to the stratagem that the old woman had taught to Zobeida, his suspicions were lulled and he became convinced that it was his beloved who lay within the coffin. He had the tomb closed again and called a great army of religious teachers and readers to intone the Koran above the dead, while he himself sat with them on a carpet and wept day after day until he fell into a decline.

For a whole month these ceremonies went on; and the khalifat ceased not to mourn over the tomb of his favourite.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Forty-first Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that on the last day of the month the prayers and readings lasted from dawn till dawn. Only then might each depart to his own place. The khalifat, who was worn out by tears and watching, entered his palace without caring to see either Zobeida or his wazir Giafar, and fell into a heavy sleep, watched over by two women slaves. One sat at his head and one at his feet, so that an hour later, when he woke, he was able to hear them talking together. Said one: "This is a sorry business, Subhia." "What is a sorry business, Nozha?" asked Subhia, and Nozha said: "That our dear master should pass his days and nights weeping over a tomb with nothing but a wooden dummy in it." "Where is Kut Al-Kulub, then?" questioned Subhia, and Nozha continued: "I have heard from our mistress's favourite slave that Zobeida had Kut Al-Kulub drugged with banj and buried among the tombs by the three eunuchs Sawab, Kafur, and Bakhita.'' ''Did she die that terrible death?'' asked Subhia weeping. ''Allah forbid,'' said Nozha. ''I heard Zobeida tell Zahra that the girl had escaped and had been living for four months with a certain young merchant of Damascus, called Ghanem bin-Ayub, the slave of love. Thus is our master deceived and weeps over an empty tomb.''

The khalifat listened to all they had to say, then jumped to his feet with a terrible cry which sent them fleeing, and yelled in his rage for his wazir Giafar Al-Barmaki. When Giafar came, the king said: ''Take your guards with you instantly and surround the house of one Ghanem bin-Ayub; rescue my favourite Kut Al-Kulub and bring the young man to me that I may have him tortured.'' Giafar hastened to do as he was bid. He summoned his guards and the wali of the city and, having found out where the house was situated, proceeded to surround it.

At that same hour, Ghanem had set a beautifully roast sheep stuffed with spiced meats before Kut Al-Kulub and both were eating it joyfully with their fingers. Suddenly the girl looked from the window and saw a troop of guards, sworders, and mamelukes led by Giafar and the wali, surrounding the house as closely as the white of the eye surrounds the black. She knew then that the khalifat had heard the whole story and was like to be bitterly jealous of Ghanem. Her cheeks grew yellow with dismay and she cried: ''Save yourself, save yourself, my love!'' ''Light of my eyes, how can I escape when the house is surrounded?'' asked Ghanem. ''I will manage it,'' she said; and, tearing off his clothes, dressed him in rags and set on his head an earthen pot filled with scraps of bread and meat. "You can go out like this," she said, "they will take you for a slave and do you no harm. Have no fear for me; I know how to manage the khalifat."

Without even waiting to say good-bye, Ghanem left the house with the kitchen-stuff upon his head and Allah took him safely through the ranks of the besiegers.

Soon Giafar lighted from his horse and, going into the house, saw the fair Kut Al-Kulub sitting alone among rich merchandise. She had taken the precaution to put on her rarest robes and jewels and to pack the rest in a great box. She rose as Giafar entered and kissed the earth between his hands saying: "This meeting was written by the pen of God. I give myself up to you." "Dear mistress," answered Giafar, "my orders were only to seize a certain Ghanem bin-Ayub. Can you tell me where he is?" "Certainly," answered the young woman, "some days ago he packed up the greater part of his merchandise and left for his native city of Damascus to see his mother and sister. I can tell you no more than that. As for this box of mine, it contains all my costliest belongings, so I pray you have it borne carefully to the palace." Giafar ordered some of his men to carry the box, and himself, with every sign of deference and honour, requested the young woman to accompany him to the khalifat. The rest of his men he left behind to sack and destroy the house, as Haroun Al-Rachid had commanded.

Giafar hastened to tell the khalifat of Ghanem's departure for Damascus and the sultan, believing the young man had done with Kut Al-Kulub all that can be done to a beautiful young woman belonging to another, flew into a terrible rage and ordered Masrur to imprison his favourite in a dark room, under the charge of an old woman who was officially concerned with such affairs.

To deal with Ghanem was not such an easy matter. The khalifat sent out horsemen to seek him; and also, taking pen and paper, wrote the following letter in his own hand:—

> "HAROUN AL-RACHID, PRINCE OF BELIEVERS, FIFTH KHALIFAT IN THE GLORIOUS LINE OF ABBAS, TO SULTAN MUHAMAD BIN SULAYMAN AL ZAYNI, HIS TRIBUTARY IN DAMASCUS
>
> IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE
>
> News is asked of your health for you are dear to us; and prayer made to Allah for your joy and your long life.
>
> And after!
>
> Dear tributary, a young man of your city, named Ghanem bin-Ayub, came to Baghdad and violated one of my slaves, doing to her what he did. Now he has returned to Damascus and lies hid from my revenge with his mother and sister.
>
> He is to receive five hundred lashes and be carried on a camel through the streets of your city. This proclamation shall be made before him: Thus is a slave punished who lays hands on his master's goods. Then send him to me and I will do in the way of torture what need be done.
>
> You will sack his house and lay it waste, so that none may know where it stood. You will strip the mother and the sister of the young man naked, expose them for three days to the eyes of the curious, and then cast them from your city.

> You will execute this order with great zeal.
> Peace be with you.

A courier set out straightway for Damascus with this letter and reached it in eight days instead of the usual twenty.

Sultan Muhamad kissed the khalifat's letter and carried it to his forehead; then he set about obeying the commands which it contained. He caused criers to cry in the streets: "Let those who would plunder repair straight to the house of Ghanem bin-Ayub and plunder as they will!"

Taking his guards with him, he went himself to the house and knocked at the door. Fetnah opened to him and, seeing a man, covered her face and ran to tell her mother.

The elder woman was sitting by a tomb which she had built in memory of her son Ghanem, whom she supposed to be dead, since she had not heard tell of him for a whole year. She was used to sit there weeping and took neither food nor drink. She bade Fetnah show the sultan in and when he came up to the tomb, saying that his purpose was to seize Ghanem and to send him to the khalifat, she answered: "Unhappy that we are! Ghanem, child of my bowels, left us more than a year ago and we do not know what has happened to him." Then Muhamad saw no course open to him, though he was a kind-hearted man, but to sack the house, raze it to the ground, and bear the stones of it beyond the city. Much against his will, he stripped the mother and sister of Ghanem naked (though he allowed them each a sleeveless shift), and, after exposing them to the eyes of the curious for three days, cast them from the city. Thus they became wanderers even as Ghanem.

To return to the Slave of Love. He walked away from Baghdad, weeping as if his heart were broken, and journeyed all day without eating or drinking until he came to a certain village. He entered the mosque and threw himself down on a mat in the courtyard with his back leaning against the wall. He was more dead than alive from grief and want, his heart was beating wildly, and he had not the strength to ask for succour. So he remained on the mat all night, and, in the morning, people of the village found him stretched out without movement, when they came up to the mosque to pray. Seeing that he was ill and destitute, some of them brought him a pot of honey and two loaves and gave him an old tattered sleeveless lousy robe. Ghanem opened his eyes when they asked him where he came from, but he could not answer them; so they stayed by him for a while and then went about their business.

Ghanem fell very ill and lay for a whole month upon the old mat, feeble, pale, and devoured by fleas and lice. His appearance became so deathly that at last the faithful of the mosque decided to send him to the hospital at Baghdad. Some of them found a camel driver and said to him: ''If you take this poor young man on your camel and leave him at the door of the Baghdad hospital, where he may be cured by medical attention and the change of air, we will pay you well on your return.'' The camel driver consented to do so and, with the help of these good people, lifted Ghanem upon the back of his animal, mat and all, and fastened him there.

Just as the camel driver was setting out and Ghanem was weeping from weakness and despair, two poorly-clad women in the crowd said to each other: ''That poor young invalid is very like Ghanem; but it cannot be he in such a sorry state.'' These women were covered with dust and had just entered the village; they were none other than Ghanem's mother and his sister Fetnah, who were making their slow way from Damascus to Baghdad.

The camel driver mounted his ass and, taking the camel by the halter, made the best of his way to Baghdad. Arriving at the hospital he lifted Ghanem down and laid him on the steps, as the place was not yet open for the day. Then he returned to the village.

The people of that part of Baghdad soon began to come out of their houses and, when they saw Ghanem lying like the shadow of a man outside the hospital, they clustered round him with a thousand suppositions. While each was telling the other what he thought, the principal sheikh of one of the markets approached and said to himself: ''By Allah, if that young man is taken into the hospital, he is as good as dead already. I will have him carried to my house and Allah will perhaps recompense me when I come to the Garden of Delights.'' He made his slaves bear the youth to his own home, and prepared a clean bed for him with good mattresses and new soft pillows. He called his wife and said: ''Allah has sent us a guest, my dear. See that he is well looked after.'' ''Be it upon my head,'' she answered, and with that tucked up her sleeves, heated water in a great cauldron, and washed the young man all over. Then she dressed him in clean clothes belonging to her husband, made him drink a glass of delicious sherbert, and sprinkled his face with rose-water. Ghanem began to breathe more freely; his strength came back little by little and with it returned the memory of his past and of Kut Al-Kulub, his beloved.

Now when the khalifat was so incensed against Kut Al-Kulub . . .

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Forty-second Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when the khalifat was so incensed against Kut Al-Kulub, she abode in the dark chamber for twenty-four days, watched over by the old woman and holding no communication with anyone else in the palace. The khalifat had quite forgotten about her when, happening one day to pass the room in which she was confined, he heard a sad voice saying over certain verses of the poets and then the same voice speaking clearly in this wise: "O Ghanem bin-Ayub, fair-souled, generous and chaste; how lofty do you appear in face of him who has persecuted you! You respected the woman of him who has shamed yours, you have guarded his woman from shame and he has dishonoured the women of your house. But a day will come when you and the khalifat will stand up before the Sole Just Judge; the angels themselves will witness on your behalf and Allah Himself will confound your oppressor."

The khalifat then understood for the first time that he had acted unjustly towards Ghanem; so he sent for Kut Al-Kulub into his presence and, when she came weeping and with bent head, he said, "My love, I heard you accuse me of injustice and oppression, saying that

I had acted ill against one who had acted well by me. Who is this man who has protected my woman while I dishonoured his, and respected my woman while I put to shame those of his house?" "It is Ghanem bin-Ayub, the Slave of Love," answered the girl, "I swear to you, O khalifat, by the kindness that you once showed me, that Ghanem ever held himself towards me as an honourable man, being by nature incapable of all brutal abominations." "I have made a sad mistake!" cried the khalifat. "Indeed, there is neither power nor wisdom save in Allah. Ask what you will, Kut Al-Kulub, and you shall receive it." "Prince of Believers, I ask for Ghanem bin-Ayub," answered the girl; and the khalifat, in spite of the love which he still felt for her, answered: "He is yours, the gift of a generous giver who never takes back. Furthermore, I will raise him to honour." Then said Kut Al-Kulub: "My lord, I would wish to be married to Ghanem when he returns to us." "So you shall," answered the khalifat. "Prince of Believers, none knows where to find this Ghanem; the sultan of Damascus himself has told you that he knows not what has become of him. Allow me myself to make the necessary search; for I feel that Allah will give him back to me." "You have my leave to do what you think fit," answered the khalifat.

Kut Al-Kulub was overjoyed at this permission and hastened to leave the palace, carrying with her a purse of a thousand gold dinars.

On the first day she travelled throughout the city of Baghdad, making enquiries which led to nothing.

On the second day, she visited all the shops in several markets and, telling her story to the principal sheikh of each, gave him a large sum of money to distribute among the stranger poor.

On the third day, she visited the market of the goldsmiths and jewellers, and when she had told her story to the principal sheikh of that guild, giving him gold at the same time for all needy wanderers, he said to her: ''Curiously enough, my mistress, I have just taken a strange young man, who is very ill, into my own house. I know neither his name nor his condition. (Indeed the young man was Ghanem bin-Ayub, but the sheikh did not know this.) I imagine him to be the son of noble parents for, though he is worn to a shadow, he is still beautiful and has exquisite manners. Probably he was reduced to his present state by running into debt, or by some unhappy love affair.'' Kut Al-Kulub felt her heart beat wildly at these words and said: ''Old man, I know that you may not leave the market at this hour; therefore I pray you lend me someone who can lead me to your house.'' The sheikh of the goldsmiths called a little child, who knew his house, and said: ''Felfel, lead this lady to my house at once.'' So little Felfel walked in front of Kut Al-Kulub and led her to the sheikh's house where the stranger was lying ill.

As soon as they reached the house, the young woman saluted the sheikh's wife, who recognised her and bowed to the earth before her. ''Good mother,'' said Kut Al-Kulub, after the necessary ceremonials had been gone through, ''tell me where I may find the young stranger who is lying ill here.'' The older woman began to weep and, leading her into another chamber, said: ''There he lies upon the bed. If we may go by appearances, he is surely of a noble race.'' Kut Al-Kulub leant over the bed and scrutinised the stranger with eager attention; but she could not recognise her Ghanem in this feeble ghost of a man. Nevertheless, her heart was moved to pity and she wept, saying:

"Hard is the lot of strangers, even if they are princes in their own country." She gave what was left of her money to the sheikh's wife and recommended her to spare no expense in curing the young man; she herself prepared the draughts which had been prescribed for the invalid and gave them him to drink; then, after sitting for an hour by the head of his bed, she said farewell to the sheikh's wife and returned to the palace.

Every day she visited different markets and spent her time in continual search. Once, as she was hunting hopelessly, the sheikh of the goldsmiths met her and said: "Mistress Kut Al-Kulub, you commanded me to bring you any stranger that I should find passing through Baghdad; I have here for your benevolence two women of high rank, a mother and a daughter whom I found wandering in goat-skin garments, with wallets about their necks as if they were beggars. They were weeping and weary, so I have brought them to you, O queen of goodness, knowing that you would pity and sustain them without asking indiscreet questions. As we are good to them, I trust that Allah will reward us in his Paradise." "I would much like to see them," answered Kut Al-Kulub.

So the sheikh brought them to her and when she saw their beauty, their nobility, and their rags, she wept, saying: "As Allah lives, they are of noble birth and little accustomed to hardship. Their faces were born for honour and repose." "You say truly, my mistress," answered the old man, "surely tyranny has been at work upon their house and upon their goods. Let us help them, since Allah has promised rewards to them who love the poor." All three women wept at this, for each remembered Ghanem bin-Ayub, the Slave of Love, though they could not read each other's thoughts. At last they dried their eyes and the older woman said: "Generous lady, pray to Allah that we may find whom we seek. We are looking for the child of my bowels, my son Ghanem bin-Ayub." At this name the girl understood that these were the mother and the sister of Ghanem; so she uttered a loud cry and fell fainting on the floor. When she came to, she threw herself into the arms of the other women, saying: "Trust in Allah, my sisters, and trust also a little in me; for this day shall be the last of your misfortunes, the first of your happiness. Be comforted!"

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

But When
The Forty-third Night
Had Come

She said:

It is related, O auspicious King, that when Kut Al-Kulub had said: "Be comforted!" to Ghanem's mother and sister, she turned to the sheikh of the goldsmiths and gave him a thousand dinars, saying: "Conduct them to your house and tell your wife to take them to the bath and give them fair new robes. I wish her to spare neither expense nor care in looking after them."

Next morning Kut Al-Kulub went to the sheikh's house to see for herself that her instructions had been carried out; and scarcely had she entered when the sheikh's wife, with many expressions of thanks, introduced Ghanem's mother and sister to her, shining and transformed from the bath. Nobility and beauty shone from their faces and the khalifat's favourite was pleased to sit and talk with them for an hour.

Then she asked after the invalid and was told that he was much the same. So she took the other women with her, who had not previously seen the young man, and went to visit him. All looked at his unconscious form with pitiful tenderness and sat down to talk beside his bed. In the course of their conversation the name of Kut Al-Kulub was mentioned, and immediately the young man's colour came back to him, he rose on his elbow in a little strength, and opened his eyes, crying: "Where are you, Kut Al-Kulub?"

The young woman recognised his voice and leant over him, saying: "O my dear, my dear, you are indeed Ghanem!" "Yes, I am Ghanem," said he; and straightway Kut Al-Kulub fell fainting to one side, and Ghanem's mother and sister to the other.

When they came to they cast themselves upon Ghanem and you can imagine that there was no lack of kisses and of tears and of cries of joy.

Soon Kut Al-Kulub became calmer and said: "Praise and thanks be to Allah who has brought us all together again at the last." She told Ghanem the whole story, as far as she knew it, and added: "The khalifat believes me, he has taken you into favour and wishes to see you. Also he consents to our marriage." Ghanem, who had so lately been near dying of sorrow, now was not far off dying of joy. He went on kissing the hands of his mistress, until at last she said: "Wait here for me; I will return in a little while."

She hurried to the palace, and providing herself with with great store of dinars, gave them to her friend the sheikh, saying: "For the two women and for Ghanem buy four complete costumes of the most beautiful material you can find, with twenty handkerchiefs each, ten belts, and ten changes of each garment." Then she returned to the house and led all three to the baths. When they were bathed and soothed, she prepared chickens, meat broth, and purified wine; with which she fed them for three days, until they all became as strong, as beautiful, and as happy as they had ever been. On the fourth day, she took them again to the hammam, had them change their clothes there, and sent them back to the sheikh's house, while she herself went to interview the khalifat.

She bowed to the earth before him and told him of the happy re-union of Ghanem and his mother and sister, taking care to lay stress upon the beauty and virginity of young Fetnah. ''Fetch Giafar!'' cried the khalifat to a slave, and when Giafar approached, he said to him: ''Fetch Ghanem bin-Ayub!''

In the meanwhile, Kut Al-Kulub had hurried to the sheikh's house and told Ghanem that he was about to be taken into the presence of the khalifat. ''Dear lover,'' she said, ''now is the time for you to display all your eloquence and resolution.'' She dressed him in the most sumptuous of his new robes and gave him a purse of gold, saying: ''Throw money about in handfulls when you reach the palace and as you journey up the hall.''

In a minute or so, Giafar arrived on his mule and Ghanem hastened to kiss the earth between his hands and give him fitting welcome. He was now the handsome Ghanem of old time, whose face was a glory and a snare.

When they came to the palace, Ghanem saw the Prince of Believers surrounded by his wazirs, his chamberlains, his tributaries, the chief persons of his kingdom, and the commanders of his guards and of his armies. Being an eloquent and resolute man, an agreeable talker, a pleasing poet, an excellent improviser, he took his stand before the khalifat, looked at the ground for a moment in reflection, and then raising his head improvised these lines:

You are the rain upon the earth of prime,
We spring up green and abundant in your time,
O King.
The sultans trail their white beards in the dust;
They offer up their crowns because they must,
O King.
Your armies fill the earth and fright the stars;
Heaven is kept busy to record yours wars,
O King.
The moon with every glittering satellite
Comes down to hang among your lamps at night,
O King.

The khalifat was charmed by the beauty of these verses, by the variety of their rhythm, and by the sweet eloquence of their author.

At this point, Shahrazade saw the approach of morning and discreetly fell silent.

And When
The Forty-fourth Night
Had Come

SHE SAID:

IT IS RELATED, O auspicious King, that when Ghanem so charmed the khalifat, Haroun Al-Rachid bade him approach, saying: "Tell me your story and hide none of the truth from me." Ghanem recounted the whole tale to him; but it would be a weary business to repeat it here. The khalifat was completely persuaded of Ghanem's innocence and the purity of his intentions, especially in respect to the words embroided upon his favourite's drawers. "I pray you pardon my injustice,'' he said, and Ghanem answered, ''O Prince of Believers, I freely pardon it. All that belongs to the slave belongs also to the master.''

The khalifat was so delighted with this answer that he gave the youth great positions in the kingdom, a royal income, a retinue of men and women slaves, and a palace to which Ghanem immediately transferred his mother, his sister Fetnah, and his beloved. Not long afterwards, the khalifat perceiving that Ghanem's sister was Fetnah, Seduction, indeed, asked her in marriage. When Ghanem consented, the Sultan thanked him and gave him a hundred thousand dinars in gold. He called the kadi and his witnesses and had two marriage-contracts written out together. On the same hour of the same night the khalifat lay with Fetnah, and Ghanem bin-Ayub, the Slave of Love, with Kut Al-Kulub.

The khalifat was so pleased, when he woke in the morning, at the memory of the night he had passed in Fetnah's virgin arms, that he had the palace scribes write out the whole story of Ghanem from beginning to end in their most elaborate caligraphy, and caused the story to be added to his library that it might serve as a lesson to future generations, and delight the minds of wise readers, so that they should admire the works of God.

''But do not believe, O king of the ages,'' continued Shahrazade, ''that this extraordinary story which I have just told you is either as pleasant or as wonderful as the war-like and heoric tale of Omar Al-Neman and his sons, Sharkan and Al-Makan.'' ''You may tell me that war-like story, for I do not know it,'' answered King Shahryar.